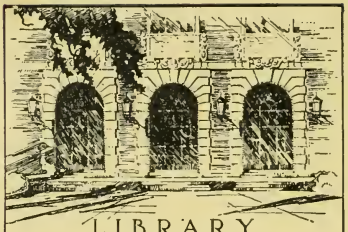
mirror.
Crewe Hall.



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THE THREE PATHS.

LONDON:
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

THE THREE PATHS;

OR,

TRUTH,

VANITY, AND PROFESSION.

BY

THE HON. MRS. ANDERSON.

"The soul's weak dwelling, batter'd and decay'd,
Lets in new lights through chinks by sickness made."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London:
FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,
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THE THREE PATHS.

CHAPTER XI.

Another year had passed, and Louisa Delville again accompanied Mrs. Somerset to London. In the intervening time the Duke of Ormanton had died, and Ernest Somerset had succeeded to the estates and title of his uncle ; a circumstance which led to much speculation among those who estimate persons by their possessions, instead of their characters or conduct. The fortunate position of Louisa in being thrown so much into his society excited much envy and ill-nature, while, conscious of the purity of her own intentions, and perfectly aware that his affections had long been disposed of, she laughed with Geraldine at the folly of the world, and continued happy and contented in the enjoyment of a cheerful mind and single eye. Mrs. Somerset never for a moment regretted that she did not share in the elevation

of her children. No such little pride could find place in her heart, and she far preferred being the widow of such a man as Mr. Somerset, to the increased importance she might have gained with the vain and weak. "The death of a good man is like the putting out of a wax perfumed candle, he recompenses the loss of light by the sweet odour he leaves behind:" and so it had been with Mr. Somerset. His good name was his children's best inheritance, and they would have sacrificed all earthly advantages, rather than forfeit so inestimable a treasure. Edith's consistent and correct conduct since her marriage had regained her admission to Mrs. Somerset's house, where Geraldine and Louisa were delighted to receive her. Algernon was now so constantly employed, that she had much time to herself; and as Mrs. Somerset was not ashamed of being seen in her unfashionable street, she frequently called for her, and took her home for the day. Her husband was no longer the wild, ill-regulated man of talent. He had put his mind in order, and by proper direction was turning all his powers and energies to useful purposes. During the hours which he passed at home he read the books with which Edith had been provided, and was becoming steady in his principles. They had still many difficulties to contend with, but resolution and good sense, strength-

ened by Divine grace, enabled them to take them cheerfully; and Edith would smilingly observe, that they deserved a few discomforts for their ill-conduct. It is the remark of a wise man that "small certainties are the bane of a man of talent." This would have been the case with Algernon, had he not been wholly thrown upon his own resources. He would have done nothing. As it was, the consciousness of the great sacrifices Edith had made for him gradually stole upon his senses, and stimulated him to exertion, while the desire of gaining the good opinion of all at Staunton gave him an increased impulse. Mr. Delville had at last consented to Mrs. Melcombe's receiving them, and as soon as it was possible for Algernon to leave London, his mother's heart was to be gladdened by the sight of her erring child. She had every reason to be satisfied with his wife, and the self-denial she had practised for them was as nothing in her eyes. Her son was but "part of herself wrapped up in another skin," and in him alone, in this world, all her affections were centred. It was not without a feeling of regret that she heard at this time from Lady Melcombe, announcing her intention of paying her a visit of a few days. It had been her annual custom, and one which she kept as conscientiously as her Sundays, or any other daily or weekly habit.

Lady Melcombe was what may be termed a "duty woman," that is to say, she had made an excellent wife as far as a mechanical performance of the office was concerned, but her husband had never succeeded in ascertaining whether she loved him or not; she had been equally irreproachable as a mother, but her daughters entertained no affection for her, and were sensible of none on her part. Their youthful spirits and childish enjoyments were regarded as contemptible. It was beneath her to smile or to joke, and sympathy was utterly incomprehensible to her unimaginative mind. If they were ill, she attended them with care and attention, but no tenderness of manner accompanied her watchfulness. If they did wrong, the punishment was sure, and no after circumstances could lessen its endurance. If they did well, it was received as a matter of course. As a mistress, the same undeviating course was pursued. The servants were paid, and as such were expected to do their work, but no look or word expressed approval. If they failed, they were at once dismissed. Any amusement was considered a ridiculous indulgence. No friends were admitted, and no going out allowed. She considered them as so many pieces of machinery, wound up for a certain space of time, and that every minute not devoted to duty was stolen from

herself. The consequence was evident. Good wages secured a cold service, but no affection accompanied it. To Lady Melcombe, this was a matter of indifference. Never having felt the need of affection herself, it was not in her power to appreciate the wish for it in others. She regarded all expressions of sympathy as weakness, letters of condolence as an indulgence of selfish feeling in the writer, answering them as an unnecessary trouble. She had never been known to forgive one who had erred. No excuses were received or allowed for the slightest dereliction of duty; having known no trial or sickness herself, she could make no allowances for temperament, prejudice, or early education. In short, "she was one of Nature's macadamized achievements,"—no stone or rut was to be seen. It was all smooth and hard. She had regarded Charles Melcombe's marriage as a great folly, and as such, had never taken much notice of his wife. Her intention had been to marry him to a certain lady in the neighbourhood, some ten years older than himself. In addition to this, it was impossible to find out who her parents were, or, indeed, if she had ever had any. In appearance she was tall and thin, with very red hair, grey blood-shot eyes, which seemed intent upon a diligent research into the back of her head, so entirely did they turn in opposite directions; her nose was broad and

flat; her lips so thin, and her mouth so long, that it resembled a slit more than that which it represented; her chin was sharp and projecting; her teeth seemed contending for place, one being apparently bent on excluding the other. Totally without education or refinement, she was wholly devoid of any recommendation but that of possessing fifty thousand pounds. Lady Melcombe had strongly advised her brother-in-law to marry her, had even represented it as a duty, and upon his expressing his disgust, had actually gone so far as to tell him that he ought to pray that he might be able to like her[1]. All her arguments were lost on Charles Melcombe, and finding himself incessantly thrown in the way of this unpleasing woman, and being too honourable to trifle with her feelings, though plain people are supposed to have none, he had rejoined his regiment, and, as we have seen, had married from affection and esteem. Lady Melcombe regarded herself as highly injured; she always spoke of him as "Poor Charles, what a sad marriage he had made!" She expected to have a large family thrown upon her hands, and valiantly resolved that she should leave them to suffer the proper return of their folly. Mrs. Melcombe she regarded as an artful, designing woman; and, quite forgetful that

[1] A fact.

the advantages had been decidedly on her side, would have made every body believe that her brother-in-law had married a person unworthy of her notice. It was, consequently, a continued matter of surmise to her, how they lived and looked so respectable, why they should have so many friends; and having frequently in imagination penned the magnanimous refusal she intended to make, and all her strictures and advice, should an appeal be made to Sir Henry's brotherly feelings, she was rather disappointed at finding no opportunity of sending her letter. During Mrs. Melcombe's residence in London, after her husband's death, she constantly passed her door in her splendid equipage, but it never occurred to her that her poor sister-in-law, who had from her earliest years breathed the pure air of the country, might be refreshed by a drive. She thought it better not to encourage such a wish, as it might make her more sensible of the want of a carriage. Though receiving, daily, large supplies of fruit and flowers from the country, none ever found their way to Mrs. Melcombe's melancholy lodging. She occasionally made her a condescending visit, in which she generally contrived to declaim upon the narrowness of the staircase and the closeness of the street; and as she stepped into her elegant barouche, she quite forgot that most expressive text, "He that

hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Not that Mrs. Melcombe was the sufferer, for many hearts warmed towards her—"a stranger, they took her in,"—and she could scarcely refrain a smile sometimes at Lady Melcombe's self-importance. Another of her fancies was, that being ill was altogether an imagination, and that dying was a weakness which determination would prevent. She had remedies for every thing. She always knew innumerable people who had exactly similar complaints, only each case was worse than the invalid's she was visiting. If the windows were shut, she was sure that air would strengthen the nerves, and she would throw them open, leaving the poor invalid, whose languid circulation was incapable of restoration, in a state of chill and excitement, which hours could not restore. If the windows were open, a draught must be dangerous. While Mrs. Melcombe was in spirits and in health, she could be amused with Lady Melcombe's absurdity; but in her present frail and suffering state she dreaded her approach. On her arrival, having pictured to herself that the time was at last arrived when her sister's reduced condition would justify the delivery of her long pent-up lectures on the folly and imprudence of her marriage, and the weak indulgence which had

been the cause of her son's ill-conduct, she was both surprised and mortified at the comfort and elegance which surrounded Mrs. Melcombe, and still more at the cheerfulness of her reception. It was with no small feeling of disappointment that she gazed on the pretty house, the well-kept lawn, and the elegant little drawing-room, so unlike what her imagination had depicted. For a few minutes the sight of the pale cheek and emaciated form of her widowed sister-in-law made a kind of impression she could scarcely comprehend, so new was the sensation of pity to her mind. She spoke in a piano voice, inquired with some interest about her health, but avoided all inquiry after Algernon and Edith. In a very little time she quite forgot that Mrs. Melcombe was an invalid. In imagination she endowed her with her own exuberant health and spirits, and when she saw the pale cheek gradually become tinged with a crimson hue, she felt quite assured that talking had done her good, and that she was moped to death from being so much alone. Fortunately for her poor sister, her restless disposition made her weary of the invalid's room, so complaining of the heat, she proposed calling on Mrs. Delville ; adding, that when the horses were rested she should order her carriage, as she was quite sure that change of scene was necessary, and that a drive would do her good.

She then looked round her room, and observing with a supercilious smile, that she seemed to have the best of every thing, walked with great dignity into the garden, well pleased to have escaped the weakness of having contributed herself to this unwelcome result. Mrs. Melcombe, completely exhausted, fell back on her couch, and during the three hours in which the robust and well-pleased Lady Melcombe amused herself in the village, could neither speak nor move. On her entrance into the rectory, greatly refreshed and cheered by her walk, and the unbounded astonishment and admiration which her magnificent appearance had attracted as she passed through the quiet little street, she expressed her happiness at Mrs. Melcombe's improved health; adding, "I really believe that the poor thing is only nervous: you should rouse her, Mrs. Delville, you pet her too much." Mrs. Delville quietly answered, that such suffering as hers, and all the affliction she had experienced, were quite sufficient to excite the deepest sympathy, and that nothing but quiet could save her life.

Lady Melcombe persisted that it was all her own fault, that she wanted air, exercise, and cold water; for that she always required it herself; and her dear friend Mrs. Grenville, and all her daughters, had a bath at hand, into which they incessantly plunged during the

day. Mrs. Delville, horrified at the idea of the poor, delicate Mrs. Melcombe being soused into a cold bath, said that death would certainly be the consequence of such a system. Not at all abashed, Lady Melcombe next advocated mesmerism, and threatened to send down one of her favourite quacks to act upon her; and finding the proposal meet with no assent, she got quite angry, and with an assurance that they were all doing their best to kill her sister with their nonsensical coddling and pity, she gave her splendid Indian shawl an indignant twitch, and rose to take her leave. As she walked away, she inwardly vented her rage at the conceit and impertinence of the Delvilles, who dared to oppose her opinions, and at the folly and weakness of that poor silly Maria Melcombe. She seemed to regard her living at all as quite a mistake; for what was the use of a woman who did no good by living but trouble her relations, and yet would not die to be pitied when she was out of the way? She next attacked Mrs. Somerset, though with a little more reserve than she had done Mrs. Delville, whom, as the wife of a country clergyman, she considered had no right to have any free will or opinion of her own. All her efforts were, however, as fruitless at Staunton as at the rectory. Lady Melcombe might be

the ruling genius of her own house, but her voice was but a unit in the world. At Staunton village, the total absence of feeling which she manifested towards Mrs. Melcombe, would have made her an object of detestation to other minds. As it was, she was pitied, for she injured none but herself. On her return, she found her sister more pale and exhausted than when she had left her, which she attributed to the perfume of flowers, the heat of her room, and her being so long alone. She consequently bustled about, altered all her pillows, turned out the flowers, opened and shut the windows, and pressed her to eat a variety of rich viands, which under the fear of not being sufficiently well fed, she had provided for herself. Having at last succeeded in making Mrs. Melcombe thoroughly uncomfortable, and almost driven her into hysterics, she entertained her all the evening with an unqualified abuse of her kindest friends, and of the folly of her sister, in allowing herself to be made their object of interest and affection. She began to think that she should quite like to lie upon her sofa. It must be pleasant to escape all the rudeness and disagreeables of the external world, and to be surrounded by worshippers.

Mrs. Melcombe was too gentle, and was possessed of too real a Christian spirit to reply with

asperity; but she thought that if Lady Melcombe were to make the exchange, and were obliged to bear all the hours of weariness, loneliness, and suffering to which she was constantly exposed, she would find the free use of her limbs, the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, the quick interchange of thought and feeling among friends, and above all the power of joining in the services of the church in God's house, were far preferable even to the alleviations which love and good feeling brought into her sick-room, however grateful they might be. She said nothing. Where no delicacy or refinement of mind exists, there is a total disregard to the feelings of others; self is paramount, and all perception deadened. To such people the remark may be applied, which was made of the Bourbon family, "They never forget, and they never learn!" All is ground down to the same measure: circumstances, differences of education, and the various formations of minds are quite incomprehensible to them. They are like breathing statues, hard and uncompromising—neither born for sympathy nor for love; but ready to fall and crush all who handle them. Lady Melcombe's object was the display of her own superiority, more than any consideration for her relation. She thought of nothing but her own consequence, and having been disappointed in the impression she had hoped to make by the osten-

tation of her dress and equipage, she was unsparing towards Mrs. Melcombe. Having found fault with all she did, she proceeded next to entertain her with a long list of all those whose trials, discomforts, and sufferings were greater than hers; all the sad accidents, deaths, and diseases that she had ever heard of. Mrs. Melcombe had providentially been gifted with strong nerves, so that these sad reminiscences did not affect her as they might have done, if she had been of another mould; but the excitement she had undergone had so agitated her, that when Lady Melcombe, after a hearty supper, left her for the night, it was with difficulty that she could restrain her tears. She thought of the happy days when all her trials were lightened by the affection of her husband; of the support she had lost in his noble, manly, and independent mind; of the Christian sympathy to which she had been accustomed; and she longed to remind Lady Melcombe of the words of the Preacher, "Add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed, neither turn away thy face from a poor man." Remembering that dwelling upon unkindness only irritates, and that while fierce passions discompose the mind, "it is a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful," Mrs. Melcombe turned to higher thoughts for consolation, and in the contemplation of the many comforts, which "in the multitude of her sorrows re-

freshed her soul," she composed herself by prayer and retired to her sleepless bed. While Lady Melcombe enjoyed a dreamless sleep, looking forward on the morrow to a return to her own most luxurious home, and a house full of company, not friends, for to friendship she was a stranger, she never for a moment reflected upon the different position of Mrs. Melcombe; and yet the poor and widowed Maria Melcombe would not have exchanged with the rich Lady Melcombe, for was not God "at hand to bless her trial hour of woes;" and

> "Is not the pilgrim's toil o'erpaid
> By the clear rill and palmy shade;
> And see we not up earth's dark glade,
> The gate of heaven unclose?"

To those who are separated by suffering or sorrow from the turmoil of the external world, the things of eternity become brighter. All of this life is seen unveiled. Life is no longer seen through the false light of pleasure. The things of time appear like a dream. It is difficult to imagine them a reality. Truth takes the place of the world's lie, and brighter visions occupy the space once filled by hopes which have been blighted, and fears which have been more than realized. Faith alone remains,

> "The child-like faith that asks not sight,
> Waits not for wonder or for sight,
> Believes because it loves aright,
> Shall see things greater, things divine.

Heaven to that gaze shall open wide;
And brightest angels to and fro
On messages of love shall glide,
'Twixt God above and Christ below."

Mrs. Melcombe had lost all that could give charm to this life, but she had not been in the school of discipline for nothing, and willingly acquiesced in her Saviour's voice, gently whispering in her ear,

"My servant, let the world alone:
Safe on the steps of Jesus' throne
Be tranquil, and be bless'd."

And Maria Melcombe was tranquil, and was blessed, doubly blessed in that peace of God which passeth all understanding. Lady Melcombe's visit was to her as a passing wind. For a time it disturbed the order of things, but when the hurricane had ceased, non-resistance had prevented concussion, and she returned to the quiet routine of her uneventful life as though it had never been. The following morning, Lady Melcombe arose with the full determination of showing her dissatisfaction by an early departure. Her magnificent carriage covered with plates and arms, and four horses whose harness groaned with ornament, came to the lowly porch of Heath Farm; Lady Melcombe, till the moment the door closed, continued to declaim against her sister-in-

law's obstinacy in refusing to be quacked to death, and the absurdity of her giving way to nervous fancies. As she rolled along, she almost forgot her existence; and when she contrasted the splendour of Belgrave Square with the simplicity and small "dimensions of Heath Farm," she congratulated herself that she had not been mean-spirited enough to marry for that imaginary passion called love; and was more than ever persuaded of Maria's folly. On her arrival she found Sir Henry in his study, but not before the bustle and confusion consequent upon her return had left him no doubt of the fact, more especially as he stood in considerable awe of his authoritative wife. She hastened to disburden herself of her grievances, and expressed her firm conviction that Mrs. Melcombe was rapidly recovering, and surrounded with enjoyment. She assured Sir Henry that any remembrance even of affection from him was totally uncalled for. She then left him, with the intention of adding a variety of handsome ornaments to her already overloaded rooms, and to order her dress for the next drawing-room. There are few among the rich or poor who have not met with Lady Melcombes. The quiet remark of "always ill," is very nearly equivalent to "is dead." Instead of being regarded as an additional cause of suffering, sympathy is at once suspended. Not to die is almost regarded

as a slight upon society. If the invalid is unselfish, and anxious to make efforts for the sake of friends, the illness is imaginary; if, on the contrary, complaints are made, it is tiresome; if occasionally nervous or irritable, it is temper; if bright and cheerful, it is regarded as want of feeling. The pleasure expressed in trifling changes in dress or furniture is treated as a proof of frivolity; those who pass the censure being wholly forgetful that to one who knows no change from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the smallest things become of importance. If in the enjoyment of the society of some kind and sympathizing friend, a common acquaintance is excluded, or some friend who considers that entrance is a right, because two are more fatiguing than one, offence is immediately taken; self and not the sick is considered; and it was the remark of one, who for years had suffered from sickness and sorrow, and who at the last was hurried to the grave by indiscreet attempts to force her into impossible exertion, "that the animadversions and selfishness of the healthy were her greatest discomfort." All who have known much of sickness will respond to this observation, and join in the dying voice of another, exclaiming, "Gently, gently, you know not how little I can bear." The mind of those who are shut up by sickness requires tender dealing. The vessel that

is cracked cannot bear the same pressure as one that is uninjured; and it is as ridiculous to regard the mind as equal in power to that of the healthy and prosperous, as to suppose that a person with a strained ancle can walk or run as fast as one who is unhurt. The mind receives impressions more easily, and retains them with more tenacity; any thing unpleasant that has passed distresses and irritates; and while the visitors return to gaiety and amusement, the invalid, unable from weakness to rise from depression, often sinks into despondency or self-reproach at some hasty words uttered perhaps from mere nervous irritability or excitement. All invalids are subject to three acts: the first one of anxiety and interest; this is followed by impatience at the continuance of illness, or the failure of remedies—physicians have lost their skill, medicines their power; then comes indifference or neglect. The invalid of long standing may truly say that there is but one Friend who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

> "One voice to brace and cheer
> The lonely watcher of the fold;
> When nights are dark, and foemen near,
> When visions fade, and friends grow cold."

It was a day of real satisfaction and happiness to Mrs. Melcombe, when Algernon and

Edith were to make their first appearance at Staunton. It was not without anxiety that she anticipated her introduction to her daughter-in-law, for though she had occasionally caught a glimpse of her at church at Langdale, she had never been near enough to see her features, or even hear her voice. There had been no unkindness, either in feeling or expression on her part, so that there was nothing to prevent their meeting from being pleasant; but Mrs. Melcombe had too much good sense, to expect her son's wife to feel to her as a mother at first sight. She only hoped by degrees to secure her affection; and if such a method were oftener pursued, there would not be, as there so frequently is, a separation in affection in families. Too much is required from the young wife. Suddenly introduced into a large circle to which she is perhaps an entire stranger, she is expected at once to adopt all the feelings, affections, and associations of her new relations, and to forget her own. Instead of thinking, whether the son or brother is likely to be a kind and good husband to a young and inexperienced creature taken from a home, where she may have been the tenderest and dearest object of regard and affection, she is regarded with doubt and suspicion. Her look and her manner are harshly discussed, and if the sudden familiarity, with

which as a newly-adopted child of the family she is treated, is not immediately responded to, she is pronounced proud, sullen, and disagreeable. The unfortunate husband is pitied, his choice of a wife condemned, and the seeds of disunion sown. Should the wife succeed in keeping her husband's affection, the sense of injustice done towards her naturally draws him towards her family, where he sees her loved and appreciated; the animadversions which follow upon such consequences estrange still further, till distant civility takes the place of affection. Were matters allowed to flow on in a natural course, each would fit into their proper place. Those relatives who find congeniality of mind would draw together, and others would remain friendly and kind, without forcing intimacy, which can only be an unnatural tie likely at any moment to snap in two.

Mrs. Melcombe spared no pains in decking her pretty cottage for the reception of her children, but she quite acquiesced in Mr. Delville's opinion, that no outward demonstrations of joy should be exhibited beyond the happiness which arises from the pleasure of welcoming a repentant child and his erring partner.

It had been a lovely day; and now that the shadows of evening approached, the setting sun lingered on the horizon, leaving a crimson blush

on the sky. A gleam of glory seemed to rest upon Heath Farm, warming the heart with a foretaste of that celestial city, "where they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for evermore."

Mrs. Melcombe had been better than usual; the prospect of again seeing her beloved Algernon had renewed her strength, and though it was only as the shooting up of an expiring lamp, for a moment, it appeared a reality. Who has not felt the cheering influence of happiness? The infant warms in the mother's smile; the child is drawn out into confidence by love, and is equally chilled and blighted by harshness and neglect. The young are cheered by mutual and corresponding feelings; the old, by sharing their pleasure and seeing it reflected; but how much more are the weary and heavy laden brightened by affection, and how does the voice of love give vigour and life to the wounded spirit! Such had been Mrs. Melcombe's feelings on this to her eventful day. The last touch of watchful love had rested on all the preparations made for the reception of Algernon and Edith, and old Jane had again arranged herself in her best. Little more than a year had passed since that memorable day, when disappointment had followed a similar adornment of her person. With

the delicacy and unselfishness which marked all their conduct, Mrs. Melcombe's kind friends at the rectory had left her in the quiet possession of her own room. No impertinent curiosity, no wish to presume upon the kindness and attention they had shown their suffering friend, intruded into their affection. Whatever they did to others, was done for the love of God, diffusing itself in love to their fellow-creatures. They expected no return, and wished for none beyond the happiness which doing right for God's sake must invariably bring. To such the return is full and free. They have laid out their possessions in good works, not from the hope that such fruits could be acceptable to God in themselves, but in the practice of the principle conveyed by our Saviour to Peter, when in answer to his reiterated assurances of his love, He constantly made the same reply: "Feed My sheep, feed My lambs."

> "The dew of Heaven is like 'God's' grace,
> It steals in silence down;
> But where it lights the favour'd place,
> By richest fruit is known."

Louisa and her sisters had passed the morning in assisting Mrs. Melcombe in all the little arrangements she had made to cheer the hearts of her son and his wife. The flowers

had been placed in the most advantageous position; the various little elegancies with which her room abounded were tastefully arranged. The muslin curtains shaded the light so as to prevent a glare; books and work might be seen, evidently proving that, though an invalid, and accustomed to the refinements which are the natural attributes of the well-born and well-bred, she was not one who neglected her mind, or allowed her fingers to be idle. Of all that surrounded her, flowers were her favourites. In them she seemed to see the only pure remains of Paradise, for Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Mrs. Somerset secured her this enjoyment in its highest degree, for no day passed without her sending all the most lovely specimens of the finest exotics from her conservatory. Though the path she trod might of itself be dark and dreary, it was brightened and cheered by the tender offices of love, so that holding fast, as she did, the anchor of the cross, the little bark, frail as it was, glided, if it did not sail, on the stream of decaying life in peace and safety. That in the end it must be destroyed, Mrs. Melcombe felt too surely; but she had no fears, for she well knew that the same protecting arm, which had supported her over the billows and waves of this

disturbed world, would never forsake her as she passed through the valley of the shadow of death.

"A calm awaiting seems to be
O'er leaf and wave:
A calm undressing, all so silently
For calmness of the grave
Unrepining.

"'Tis thus when all its wanderings past,
On the still tide
The bark doth hang its idle sail at last,
And, like a shadow, glide,
Into its rest.

"Upon the dread and dim serene,
Each thought that breaks,
And every breath that stirs the quiet scene,
A mighty Being speaks,
Whom we await.

"Such is the awful calm they learn
Beneath Thy cross,
Who fain would sit, looking for Thy return,
And count the world but loss
Thy love to gain."

The Banks in Autumn.
Thoughts in Past Years.

It was with nervous anxiety that Mrs. Melcombe, as she reposed on her couch near the window which opened upon her little flower garden, listened to every passing sound in the hope of hearing the welcome grating of the carriage wheels. Not a breeze rustled among the leaves. Nature seemed, as it were, reposing after the fatigues of the day. The air was hushed into

stillness, the gentle note of some bird chirping its good night to its fellow-songsters alone disturbed the calm ; but just as

"The curfew toll'd the knell of parting day,"

a rattling sound in the distance disturbed the peace of the quiet village of Staunton, a post-chaise (for Algernon had no carriage) dashed by the rectory, and soon found its way to the gate which had been thrown open for their reception at Heath Farm. Then indeed emotion overcame Mrs. Melcombe. The long wished for voice of her son burst upon her ear, and the sweet accents, so long estranged from her, whispered "Mother, dearest mother." She heard no more—but fell insensible into Algernon's arms. It was a painful moment for Edith ; but far from thinking herself forgotten she carefully refrained from intrusion, and willingly followed the faithful Jane to the pretty room prepared for her. There she sat in deep and sad meditation. How different would her first reception by her husband's mother have been, had she not been led to break through all deference to her own parents, to pass by all rules of propriety. Had she not helped to break that widowed mother's heart? Was not that pale cheek and fading form her doing? Just as a refreshing shower and a heart-warming gleam had imparted new life to the withered tree of blighted happiness, she had cast her shadow

over it, and now that she felt the full force of her fault she wept tears of blood, and felt her heart burn within her. By degrees, the calming influence of the peaceful and lovely scene around her, so different to the close street she had left, and the still more powerful influence of prayer, restored her to composure. The past could not be retrieved—the present was her own to cheer and brighten—and the future was in God's hands. She gazed upon the lovely scene before her, and wondered how she could have so little appreciated in former days those beauties of nature which now burst upon her with such power. Her former home appeared in a very different light to that in which she had hitherto regarded it.

Now that daily and hourly irritations had ceased, she could remember many little acts of kindness which had at the time been scarcely noticed, or had appeared matters of course. The restraints which had been so irksome to her, she now recognized as necessary. Since she had seen more of the world she felt its dangers; and she thought with horror of the days when she had allowed herself to be led by her brother to ride with the officers, and still more of all the deception she had practised to enable her to go to the ball. She had never had the courage to tell Algernon, hoping that what dwelt so strongly on her own mind, would make little impression

upon the volatile minds of her companions, who knew nothing of her, and cared only for their own amusement. As it had brought no unpleasant consequences on themselves, it would henceforth be a matter of entire indifference to them. Hers was the sin and shame. How often is this the case; and it is thus that too many are sacrificed to the passing amusement of an hour. The sharer or thoughtless promoter of that which has perhaps blighted for life, looks upon all as a pleasant dream, while its victim wakes to a fearful reality, and is destroyed for ever.

Edith had not been long alone when Algernon came to say that Mrs. Melcombe had asked for her. He gazed with affection upon her tearful face, and never felt so warm a feeling in his heart as when he found that the tears had fallen for his mother's sorrow. He helped her to remove their traces, and leading her to Mrs. Melcombe, she for the first time knew a mother's love when enfolded in her arms. Both were deeply grieved to see the ravages of sickness and sorrow on her face. It seemed a silent and speaking reproof, for none had passed her mouth. She had forgiven and forgotten. She had often thought of the lines on a German shrine, "Look not mournfully into the past, it comes not again; wisely improve the present, it is thine; and go forward

to meet the shadowy future without fear, and with a manly heart." To her the past was sad indeed. Her future would not be here. She could look to none in this world; and now that she had seen the happiness of her son in possessing a wife whose whole wish was to prove herself affectionate and faithful, and knew that the seed for good had taken root in his heart, she could have said with the aged Simeon,—

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

CHAPTER XII.

The Duke of Ormanton was no longer a child: the boy had become a man. Tall and graceful, his countenance expressed every good feeling; it was manly, yet gentle; firm, but kind, open, and generous. His eyes were a dark hazel; his forehead full and high, expressive of noble feeling and intellect. A profusion of light brown hair, curling slightly round it, gave softness to the whole. All spoke of a high soul, one incapable of a mean action, one who dreaded no man's scrutiny, because there was nothing to conceal. Though by his fortune and position wholly independent of his mother, his first thought was for her, his first wish to gain the good opinion of one who would judge him by the Word of God, and not by worldly maxims. The judicious system she had pursued had fully answered her most earnest wishes; and now that the day of implicit obedience had ceased, she was his friend. Experience had proved her his best adviser, and, unlike the greater part of

those of his own age, he was satisfied to be led, till he had become sufficiently acquainted with the intricacies of the road before him not to fall into danger. Deeply sensible of the disadvantages of a home education, more especially where the boy is regarded by all around him as the future master, and consequently made to regard himself of the first importance, Mrs. Somerset had sent him to Eton. There she felt that he would find his level, and that instead of being toadied and flattered into becoming conceited and overbearing, he would be forced into bearing and forbearing. Nothing tends more to the ruin of a character than the being always with inferiors. Far from its being humility that leads to this result, pride is at the bottom of it. The boy-man who has been a tyrant at home without scarcely knowing it, becomes self-willed and selfish, and is fully convinced that he is a king in the world, because on his own estate he has been treated as such. To his great surprise, on launching on the ocean of life, he finds winds and waves of opposition of which he had never dreamed. Noble vessels of all kinds surround him, and he is only regarded as one of themselves. Indignant and disgusted, he either returns to the gloomy and solitary grandeur he has left, or takes his stand among meaner craft, where his superiority is acknowledged and tole-

rated. Contradiction becomes hateful to him, and from constant association with little and sordid minds, ready at all times to pander to his vices, submit to his caprices, and flatter his vanity, he shrinks from all that is great and good, and takes refuge in obscurity. It is this which leads to so many of the inferior and low connexions in marriage. Artful and designing, some quick, intelligent, and uncompromising spirit gains an easy influence over such a mind. By incessant flattery it becomes inflated; passion is encouraged; remonstrance becomes vain. None appreciate him in the same manner; he is not understood, not regarded; and having vainly attempted to make others think as highly of him as he thinks of himself, he becomes a willing victim, and is lost irretrievably.

Mrs. Somerset had so prepared her son for all the temptations that he would meet with at Eton, that Ernest was not taken by surprise, and consequently not conquered. She had pointed out its dangers, and taught him the remedy. By instilling a high gentlemanly feeling and encouraging refinement of mind, she had secured an antidote against the low and coarse manners so prevalent in the present day. By self-respect she taught him to respect others, and to have that submission to his governors, pastors, and masters, which our duty to our neighbour incul-

cates. They were not held up to ridicule, or their commands despised; not regarded as cruel taskmasters, but as watching anxiously for the good of the souls committed to their care, and to be deserving of every support under the heavy and painful responsibility which is laid upon them. "Reverence is an ennobling sentiment; it is felt to be degrading only to the vulgar mind, which would escape the sense of its own littleness by elevating itself into the antagonist of what is above it."

The highest standard had always been held up to Ernest Somerset,—not the low grovelling standard of the world, but that presented by Him who came down from heaven to set us an example of purity and holiness. In her behaviour to him his mother had given him the confidence due to an upright boy, without the independence which belongs to age and experience. His allowance had been liberal, and according to his future expectations, but not such as the more enlarged demands of a man would require. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Fully aware of this, a spirit of true generosity had been cultivated, while the reckless squandering of silly good nature so often miscalled by that name had been discouraged. What is considered by weak people generosity is a mere selfish

feeling which has no power to refuse, and often gives what is not its own. The claims of the honest are thus neglected for the clamorous demands of appetite and pleasure, while no self-denial or one good principle is satisfied. Although admitted into the society of his mother's friends at home, she had never taken him to those most pernicious amusements called children's balls, nor forced him into company where the faults of the boy are judged as those of a man, and where flirting and drinking, which hereafter become destruction to the soul, are encouraged as ridiculous and amusing.

Mrs. Somerset had acted like a skilful gardener, who watches the young plants, places them in sunshine, shelters them from the cold blast, till they gain strength and hardihood, —then gently transplants them, still carefully watching them till they are full grown and in flower, when he exhibits them to the world. She provided him freely with the innocent recreations suited to his age, opened his mind and enlarged his ideas by biography, travels, entertaining and instructive stories, which he read while she and Geraldine worked. She sent him with his tutor yearly tours, so as to enlarge the sphere of thought and knowledge. She constantly corresponded with him, encouraging him to tell her all his feelings and amusements, and while she corrected and guided the first,

took pleasure in the last. Thus she became the confidant of those youthful aspirations which, unsupported by judgment or discretion, so often become injurious, and lead genius into error. "It is a false and vulgar opinion that rules are the fetters of genius: they are the fetters only of men of no genius;" and those who despise them, seldom, if ever, do lasting good. It may create astonishment and sensation for the time, but invariably falls to the ground. If there be any reality in it, it is afterwards worked out by sober or wise judgment, which has added knowledge and understanding to talent. The desire to do good for good's sake generally succeeds, while the wish to exalt self in most, if not all, ends in disappointment.

Mrs. Somerset's hope was to see her son living to the glory of God and the welfare of man. That it might be said of him, "Though his father die, yet he is as though he were not dead: for he hath left one behind him that is like himself[1]." On his going to college she pursued the same plan, and strongly deprecated the idea that greatness and riches could be a plea for idleness and extravagance. The old but true saying that "knowledge is power," is one that should be strongly impressed on the youthful

[1] Ecclus. xxx. 4.

mind. How invariably may its influence be seen, and how much does it elevate the highest station! The desire of knowledge is one that improves and strengthens the character, the more it is indulged within the bounds of what is lawful. "While presumption plucks only evil from the tree of knowledge, while indifference lies blighted even beneath the tree of life," the earnest search after truth is as a well of water ever springing up with renewed freshness. The well-furnished mind, like a happy home, knows no ennui, no longing for forbidden fruit. Its happiness is in itself, and at all times can find a refuge from discontent or despondency. It walks abroad like the happy husband and father from his home for air and exercise or duty, or the cheerful interchange of friendship and courtesy, but returns with renewed vigour and affection to its own sacred delights. In the thankful enjoyment of a wise and understanding heart and a right judgment in all things, it receives and imparts that joy which God alone can give.

Ernest had not been taught to look forward to the dukedom of his uncle, but to consider himself only in the certainty of the property inherited from his father, which though left to his mother for her life, she fully intended to resign to him on his coming of age. The duties, though not perhaps the influence of

both stations, were alike. Ernest Somerset and twenty thousand a year would find himself in the possession of great opportunities for good, and great responsibility; and Mrs. Somerset continually impressed upon him the folly of living in an ideal prospect, which might never be realized. Superiority of mind and feeling soon found him acquaintance at college of the same caste, and thus strengthened him against the temptations offered by the common herd, who live to eat, drink, and be merry, with no end in view but self-indulgence and sensuality, levelling themselves to the condition of the brute creation. He left college, neither encumbered with debt nor groaning under a lost character, but having distinguished himself by industry, honour, and integrity, as much as if his future support had depended upon his own exertions. Even his unexpected succession to his uncle's title and fortune made no change in his determination; and he returned to his anxious and praying mother with every promise of walking in his father's steps.

On taking possession of Ormanton, he was anxious that Mrs. Somerset and Geraldine should accompany him, and consider it as their home; but to this she would not consent. She was ready and willing at all times to visit him, and to act as hostess whenever he wished to include ladies in his invitations; but she consi-

dered it undesirable to make the domestic circle so agreeable as to lessen the prospect of her son's marrying,—an event which she contemplated with much pleasure, and one of much importance to all dependent on him. The *éclat* of appearing as the mistress of Ormanton had no charms for her. "She formed one of those bright spots in society which are rarely met with, where selfishness has been early dethroned, and kindly affections are beaming forth and diffusing pleasure to all within their reach. An enlarged heart was ready to pour out its sympathies, and she was ready to render practical assistance, with a gentle thoughtfulness peculiarly her own. There seemed to be none of the elements of discord in her constitution, unless truth was made the ground of offence." Then indeed she would fight to the death, for she was not one of those unfortunate people called "sweet creatures," whose sweetness is very little removed from folly, and is merely the consequence of having no opinions, will, or claims of their own; by allowing themselves to be acted upon wholly by others, they become mere tools, to be cast aside when no longer useful.

"Some men (says Burke) are said to be of an easy temper, because they have not substance enough in them to be ruffled," and thus become victims, not to the love, but to the selfishness

of others. Amiable and gentle dispositions who, rather than expose themselves to conflict, thus sacrifice themselves, may do little harm in the world, but seldom do good. It may be, and is, well to give up in matters comparatively indifferent, but when real happiness and comfort are affected by yielding, our own course must then be quietly followed. It should be asked what right others have over us? If it be that of affection, then our enjoyment or happiness would be their only consideration. If it be that of a relation, none but a parent or husband has any, excepting that of mutual regard; and in the case of parent and child, each must as life advances have separate claims and interests, which may be imperative. Even to a parent it would be impossible, when youth is passed, always to resign our own occupations, wills, or duties; but that is so sacred a tie, that wherever it is possible, without doing injustice to others, it should never be neglected. It may be generally observed that a tyrannical mind is seldom so powerfully exercised, as towards those who submit implicitly to unjust demands; and that while those who still maintain their own lawful independence are regarded with affection, they, on the contrary, are treated with contempt. If circumstances should remove them, their place is easily filled up. Being only reflections of

another mind, any other reflector answers the purpose. The strong mind, on the contrary, imparts a support and respect to the weak, which though at times an unpleasant yoke, when taken away, leaves the weaker mind tottering, and often shaken to the foundation. Mrs. Somerset had but one object in life, the well-doing of her children for time and eternity. She was jealous *for* them and not of them. Individually, she had parted with pleasure when she became a widow, and she felt herself ill suited to the gay and youthful spirits of her son's friends. To Geraldine she was a necessary protection; but Ernest did not need a mother's arm to lean on, though a mother's mind he still acknowledged. During his visits at Staunton Park, he had frequently met Matilda Mertoun, and had been much attracted by the gentleness of her manner, her beauty, and more especially her devoted attention to her parents. The want of mind, and disappointment in her worldly expectations, had made Lady Rockingham peevish and exacting, but nobody ever saw an impatient look, or heard a hasty word from Matilda. She cheerfully conversed upon the subjects most interesting to her mother, bore with all her infirmities, and her childish remarks, and was ever at hand to perform the sweet offices of love, which so win upon the

heart; she would amuse the lapdog, though old and disagreeable, and take her part in any trifling occupation in which she took an interest. It was often a very wearisome task, more especially as it was seldom that she could succeed in giving satisfaction. Sometimes she brought the wrong book, or was too long in finding it, or put a different coloured wool into the needle from that which her mother had selected. If she took up a book to read, she was accused of being dull and silent, and that she never told her any thing to amuse her. She would cry and say that nobody cared for her, that she was tired to death of the life she led, and that she wished Catherine were at home again, at the moment quite forgetting how disagreeable she had found her on her last visit. If Matilda was idle, she would say that it tired her to see her doing nothing. If she played and sang, it was sure to give her a headache; and, on the contrary, if the piano was unclosed, she was accused of never caring to play to her. If she went out, it was unkind to leave her alone; and if she remained at home, she was always watching her. To all this incessant provocation, Matilda only answered by increased attention. By her cheerfulness, and ready but chastened wit, she turned her mother's groans *malgré elle* into a smile, and often won her to a more serene state of mind. In her father, Matilda ever found an

agreeable companion, while her mind was strengthened by constant intercourse with one so highly gifted. She learned from him all that was noble and generous; and in return, made up for the total absence of companionship he had ever experienced in his wife. To the superior mind nothing is more trying than the constant association with those who are incapable of appreciating its motives or feelings, who blame what they do not understand, and cannot even be content to differ, but must drag down another to their own level:—

"He who ascends the mountain-tops, shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below;
Though high above the sun of glory glow,
And far beneath, the earth and ocean spread.
Round him are icy rocks; and loudly blow
Contending tempests on the naked head,
And thus reward the toils which to the summits led."

In Lord Rockingham's rides through the different parts of his estates, Matilda was ever by his side; and though she could scarcely be supposed to be deeply interested in all his agricultural pursuits, she endeavoured to appear so, for his sake, and learned much which hereafter might be useful to her, should she herself occupy the position of the wife of a landed proprietor. By learning something from every body, and profiting by all the opportu-

nities we may meet with, we often receive quite as much information as from books. It is more practically brought before us. "Theory is the skeleton, but practice is the filling up." Those, on the contrary, who go through life shut up, either in their own consequence, or wrapped in contemplation on a certain set of ideas, are seldom generally useful or acceptable. "Let others dispute whether it be properly renouncing the world, for Christians to bury their parts and persons which put forth to the bank, would turn to good account for Church and commonwealth. David, I dare say as holy a man as any of those, lived a king and died a king. The swaying of his sceptre did not hinder the tuning of his harp, his dignity being no impediment to his devotion. And whilst other kings, turning monks, pretended to go out of the world, a world of spiritual pride and superstition went into them if they had a high opinion to merit heaven by them[1]."

It is well that some such meditative and contemplative beings should exist, as to them we owe the preparation of that nutriment which, by being afterwards generally diffused, gives all that is really valuable; but if all were such, the beautiful and tasteful would be ground down to one hard and dry substance, and all that gives charm to social life would be

[1] Fuller's Church History.

lost. In the perfection of God's providence there are a diversity of gifts, which all tend to that beautiful whole which fills the holy mind with wonder, love, and praise, and the idea of uniformity in mind is as impossible as to expect it in the body. There may, and should be, a unity of spirit, but all nature is against uniformity.

Ernest Somerset had occasionally accompanied Lord Rockingham and Matilda in their rides, and had witnessed the invariable sweetness of her conduct at home, as well as her zealous attention to the schools and the wants of the poor. At the call of the sick and needy she was always ready to fly; and she might often be seen on some cold snowy or rainy day, wrapped up in a large waterproof cloak, wending her way with her maid to some distant cottage, where she knew that the absence of her daily visit would make a dark and gloomy day still more cheerless. It was on one of these excursions that she met with a very dangerous accident. On the previous evening there had been a severe snow-storm followed by a hard frost. It was one of those dull grey days when the sun finds it impossible to pierce the clouds, and nature seems clad in sober sadness. There was little to invite a delicate and tender girl to expose herself to the bitter blast of a cold east wind, but Matilda

remembered that one of her poor pensioners had been accidentally forgotten among the usual claimants on the bounty of her father on Christmas Eve. Sarah Reeves was one who suffered in silence, and who while under great deprivations, both from sickness and poverty, made every effort to maintain herself and her fatherless children in respectability. Her husband had been killed a few months before by the falling of a tree, which he had been felling, and his widow had pined and wasted away ever since that fatal day. Matilda had constantly visited her, and had prepared a basket of lighter and more delicate food, such as a weak and sickly appetite might relish. Unfortunately it had been laid on one side, and it was not till the day was far advanced that the omission was detected. Matilda immediately put on her warm winter cloak, and, accompanied by her faithful attendant, set out on her dreary expedition. Several of the servants who one and all loved her with the greatest devotion offered to go, but she thanked them kindly, and observing that she had heard that the poor woman was unusually ill and would like to see her, left them wondering at her courage, and admiring her devotion to the cause of charity. For some time the path was tolerably clearly defined, but as they advanced the snow became deeper, while in many places it had begun to

melt. Jane, the maid, became anxious as the day appeared to decline rapidly, and urged her mistress to return, and allow one of the grooms to carry the basket; but Matilda fancying that she saw a well-known mark proceeded quickly, and suddenly found herself sinking into a snow drift. The horror and consternation of Jane was indescribable, to leave the spot she did not dare, and yet if she remained how could she assist her. She vainly endeavoured to seize a portion of the cloak which was still visible, it gave way in her hand, and death seemed inevitable. In utter despair she clasped her hands in agony, and looking around endeavoured to raise her voice. Perishing with cold she found that her tongue refused to give utterance to her words, but at that moment a loud hallo arrested her attention, and, turning round, she saw a shepherd who was seeking his lost sheep, little thinking that so precious a lamb was perishing. Jane made signs, and seeing a black object on the snow he hastened to the spot. The moment he could understand her he stuck his staff into the white heap, and finding that the depth was not so great as he had feared, jumped in, and seizing the insensible form of Matilda, was able with the assistance of Jane and his boy, who had quickly followed his master, to extricate her. He immediately carried her to the lodge-gate, which was at no

great distance, and was kept by the nurse who had watched over her early years, and who was now the general practitioner of the village. She knew what was to be done, and by degrees Matilda regained her consciousness, but was so weak and exhausted, that her attempting to walk was out of the question. A message was sent to the Abbey, and a carriage with warm and dry clothing was immediately dispatched to the lodge. It was necessary to keep the sad accident from Lady Rockingham, who began to wonder that Matilda did not make her appearance as usual, and was querulously restless. She was told that she had been so chilled that she could not officiate at her boudoir tea-table. At first she was disposed to be very irritable, but when she found that the tea was as warm, and her furs and arm-chair as comfortably arranged by her maid, more especially when she entertained her with a little gossip about Langdale Park, she became easily reconciled, and dozed away as quietly as if the accustomed sweet voice of her daughter had been the charmer. Matilda's first thought on recovering from her insensibility, was for the poor woman who had thus been deprived of her promised pleasure, and she was greatly relieved to find that she had neither been forgotten nor neglected. Her next care was for her mother, who would she feared miss her constant atten-

dant. She wrote a note to Louisa Delville expressing a hope that she might be able to supply her place. It was a sad exchange from her cheerful, happy fire-side; but Louisa never thought of herself, and finding that her mother could spare her as soon as the Christmas charities had been dispensed, she prepared to obey the claim of friendship. Matilda was still entirely confined to her room from cold and fever, and at first Louisa found it very difficult to please Lady Rockingham. From not knowing her habits she was not always ready at the right moment, and the poor old lady did nothing but find fault and declaim against Matilda's folly in exposing herself in such a foolish way. On her first appearance in the boudoir she reproached her severely, and asked her what was the use of servants if they could not do her business.

"But, mamma," said Matilda, "a servant would not give the same comfort to poor Sarah that I could, and as her husband was killed in our service, she has an especial claim on us."

"Well, my dear, she has been well attended to; I have sent her every thing she could want, and I do not see the necessity of my daughter becoming a parish nurse."

"Oh! dear mamma, a few words of sympathy in such a case as hers is more than money. I know that it is impossible to be more liberal

than you are, but at the same time, a cold charity does not warm the heart like a little affectionate attention, and I feel sure that if you were well, you would often visit, as well as relieve the sick," and she kissed her mother tenderly, looking into her face with a sweet smile.

Lady Rockingham, although she could not understand her daughter's sentiments, was touched by the gentleness of her manner, and pleased by her confidence. Still she was anxious to make her promise to give up her village excursions for the future. To this Matilda felt it impossible to consent, but she humoured her mother, and carefully avoided all occasions of offence. Had Lady Rockingham been in full possession of her powers of mind, she would have considered obedience her first duty, and Mr. Delville would have strengthened her in this view of the case; but as it was she had a child more than a mother to deal with, and management must take the place of implicit obedience. It was not Mr. Delville's principle to encourage young or old to constant complaints of their family trials and discomforts. Like the good Mr. Cecil he checked such confessions and Matilda had *One* alone to whom she referred her difficulties and her trials. She remembered all He had suffered, and thus by casting her burden on her Saviour, her trials, like the feathers of a bird, although weighty in

themselves, became the means by which she rose above them. As a member of a body she felt that she had no right to expect freedom from sorrow, and would often repeat in the words of Keble:

"What? was the promise made to thee alone?
Art thou th' excepted one?
An heir of glory without grief or pain?
O vision false and vain!
There lies thy cross; beneath it meekly bow,
It fits thy stature now:
Who scornful pass it with averted eye,
'Twill crush them by-and-by.
Raise thy repining eyes, and take true measure
Of thine eternal treasure.
The Father of thy Lord can grudge thee nought,
The world for thee was bought.
And as this landscape broad—Earth, Sea, and Sky,
All centres in thine eye.
So all God does—if rightly understood,
Shall work thy final good."

And thus Matilda fulfilled her woman's mission. To neglect her parents for strangers would have been quite inconsistent with the true religion in which she had been instructed, and which she had cultivated by faith and prayer. Another hand could supply the wants of the poor, but another voice would not sound so pleasant to her father, or so kind to her mother. Another might fill her place at the Sunday or week-day school, but not at her mother's side. Matilda's was a practical

religion. In great actions and self-denials, there is something noble and generous, something that speaks of high aspirations; but the dull and dry nature of daily duty, where no eye seems to rest upon us but the eye of God, where there are none to praise or admire, or even to appreciate, is far more difficult to perform, and requires a much larger measure of grace.

"The martyr's hope half wipes away the trace
Of flowing blood: the while life's humblest cares
Smart more, because they hold in Holy Writ no place."

Lyra Apostolica.

"There are many (says the excellent Cecil) whose chief religion consists in going from church to church to hear, and from house to house to prate, but who are seldom in their closets, too seldom in close converse with God. Retired Christianity is the truest. It is easy to fill the head with notions; but to sit still, like Mary, at Christ's feet, and to be a learner, is far better." Christian courage does not consist in retiring from our duties, but in performing them in a Christian spirit, and such was Matilda's practice. Even on Sunday, if sickness or weather prevented Lady Rockingham from attending the public services of the Church, she would cheerfully forego the superior enjoyment to read them at home. She would never wilfully have neglected either public or private hours set

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apart for prayer; but she remembered our Saviour's words, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," and readily yielded to the first of all commandments, "Love." "Love," which "is the fulfilling of the law," and without which we shall not see God. It must not be supposed that her spiritual adviser, Mr. Delville, undervalued any of the public ordinances of our Church. Far from it: he was strictly attentive to all that our Reformation enjoins, modifying and altering only such customs as years and changes make no longer practicable. No church could be in more perfect order than that at Staunton. It is true that he did not unnecessarily offend prejudices, or diminish his usefulness by things in themselves of little importance in a spiritual light, but often of serious consequence, as giving offence to weaker brethren. There were no candlesticks or flowers on the altar,—no elegantly embroidered altar-cloth or hassocks;—but all was plain and handsome, consistent with the dignity of holiness, but not according to the vanity of man. The finest velvet covered the holy table, the finest linen when the Holy Communion was administered, which was frequent at all seasons, and always on appointed days. The service was throughout performed with decency and order. Mrs. Delville and Louisa took the greatest pains with the singing, so that it became a really devotional exercise, the har-

mony of the human voice elevated in strains of praise to the God of the sanctuary, which is unequalled by instrumental performance. The members of the congregation did not come dropping in at all parts of the service; for though it was impossible to prepare sermons with more prayer, study, and meditation than Mr. Delville, he still considered the church as a house of prayer, and not a house of preaching, and that those who only come to hear, can have little of the true spirit of God in their hearts. All careless or irreverent attendance he regarded as an insult to Him who hears and answers prayer. Ordinances he considered as the external guard to the light within, and one which all possessing that light would regard as its emanation. He who will refuse outward marks of respect to God, can have little of that real reverence which we so freely bestow on earthly potentates. Although not the truth, it is a witness to the truth. Faith without works is dead. The one is the proof of the vitality of the other, so that, *saved* by faith, we witness to it by love.

Of Matilda it might be said as has been so beautifully written of another, that "in her aspect there was a familiar gladness, and a holiness that you could play with and yet reverence it as much as ever; she was like a prayer offered up in the homeliest mother tongue: a religion in herself, warm, simple, true, with a

substance that could walk on earth, and a spirit that was capable of heaven [1]."

Every time Ernest Somerset saw her, he was struck more and more with the beauty of her character, and he would gladly have secured her promise to become his own, had not Mrs. Somerset's better judgment interfered. Although she was most anxious for the marriage, she was too sensible to take advantage of Matilda's youth and inexperience, or wish her son to engage himself before he had seen more of the world, and compared Matilda with others. Experience had convinced her of the fatal mistake too often made in this the most important event of our lives. Lord and Lady Rockingham's example was before her; and though it might be difficult to meet with another Matilda, and none could be so acceptable to her as a daughter-in-law, the fear of an engagement which might hereafter be fulfilled from a miscalled sense of honour, or broken off from disgust, led her to impress strongly on her son the importance of moving for a time in general society, before he took a step which must influence the whole of his after life. It would be well if more were equally prudent. The sad consequences of such early engagements may too often be seen, and many a broken

[1] The House of the Seven Gables.

heart has followed. If fulfilled they are a lengthened misery; if broken off without the mutual consent of both parties, the happiness, if not the health, of the constant lover, is perhaps ruined for ever. It is the fashion to ridicule the idea of a broken heart, but if the powers of life are injured, a general failure of strength is the consequence, and though it may not be death to the body, the whole remaining years of a long life may be only a continued suffering. At the same time, should affection change, it is much more honourable candidly to confess the alteration in feeling than to drag another into the misery and disappointment of unrequited love. Affection is a spontaneous emotion and cannot be commanded. Circumstances and opportunity may seem to give rise to congeniality of feeling. The absence of all others may have heightened charms which dwindle into obscurity when brought into contact with superiority. Idleness and vacuity may have excited interest which in the enjoyment of amusement would not have arisen. Such hasty engagements should never be made. If the affection is founded upon reality, place or circumstances will not change it, so that separation need not be dreaded. Absence will only strengthen it, the object of it will rise by comparison, and judgment will confirm what feeling has originated. Should it be otherwise, it opens

a way of escape without injuring another whose feelings might have become too deeply engaged not to mourn, perhaps for life, over blighted hopes. It is seldom that the woman ceases to love, for her mode of life cherishes affection, but "men of the world wear their affections as they do their clothes. They have them according to the fashion, and they put them on, and take them off, and when the gloss is worn they throw them away. Ardent affection and deep feeling, those profound and ennobling emotions which are nursed in solitude, are lost upon them. They have not leisure, even if they had taste, to indulge in them. There are sorrows during which it seems as if time, that never paused before, delighted to stand still. It is thus with those who are suddenly bereaved of happiness without losing the hope of regaining it. They watch the stream of events, but it passes peacefully by them, and time and chance that come to all, seem never to come to the sad." How cruel it is for a passing excitement or from vanity, thus to destroy all the sunshine of a young heart! and yet how little the world thinks of it! Such a marriage is off, such a flirtation is over; and none remember that a life may have passed away as well, that a happy home may have been clouded by a daughter's sadness, and thus what is a subject of mockery on earth may be written in heaven. The case may in-

deed be reversed, and the man be the victim of a slighted affection, as all are not mere men of the world.

The time was come when Ernest Somerset must take possession of his uncle's estates, and the preparations for the reception of the young heir were very great. The prospect of his arrival was an unmingled source of happiness, for during his occasional visits to the late Duke of Ormanton, he had gained the good opinion of all by the courtesy and kindness of his manners, which were a witness to the unselfishness and higher qualities of his heart. His uncle had been an idle, cold-hearted man, who, as long as nothing disturbed the even tenor of his way, took no note or care of any living being but himself. As a matter of course, nobody cared for him. He would give the run of his house to any who liked to come, but it never occurred to him to interest himself in the slightest degree in their amusement or occupation; and if any ventured to intrude upon his privacy or daily habits, they were sure henceforth to be excluded from Ormanton. As long as there was no diminution in his rents, he never troubled himself about his tenants. They were a sort of animal on whom he fed. If they proved fat and healthy, he was satisfied; if the contrary, he turned them out without remorse into other pastures, indifferent as to their loss or

gain. No wife or child had cheered his desolate hearth. He was a solitary man, one who lived and died unregretted; the grave closed over its own, and the world felt no void. It would be no matter of surprise that the young heir should be hailed with pleasure; nor were the expectations he had raised doomed to disappointment. Far from contemplating the princely domain before him with pride and vainglory, a sense of oppression crept over him as he remembered the greatness of the responsibility to God and man which such possessions entailed, the temptations to which he would be exposed, and how little truth he would henceforth hear: self-interest would be the acting principle of all around him, one which is ever ready to sacrifice the nearest and dearest to its shrine.

It is seldom till interest clashes that the character is known: many a smooth tongue, a cheerful companion, one who passes well through the world, appears very different when self-interest is called into action; and it has been truly said, that no man is really known until an inheritance is to be divided. The great and rich know little of those around them. To them they resemble an ill-painted scene, which, seen at a distance and under a borrowed light, looks well, but to those behind the scenes is well known to be a mere daub. Though the greater

trials of life and the greater faults may touch them, the machinery of life and the lesser cares are scarcely known to them. The poor and the lowly who have nothing to give, by whom nothing is to be gained, the sick and the sad, are those who see life unveiled; and what is often attributed to blighted hopes or morbid feeling might be more properly traced to its true cause, that such is the touchstone of reality.

Ernest's first care was to put the chapel, which had been wholly neglected during his predecessor's life, into repair and order. Although he would have considered it inconsistent to have neglected the decoration of his house suitably to his position, he would have felt it much more so to have allowed the part especially devoted to God to remain in a state of disorder. It had been beautifully adorned by his ancestors, and required little beyond cleaning to make it a singularly striking edifice. The carving of the wood was perfect, the stained glass shed a rich and chastened light throughout, the monuments around told of passing greatness, and reminded Ernest forcibly that others like himself had stood in youth and manly beauty with fresh hopes and high aspirations in those consecrated halls. He thought of the words of the prophet Zechariah:—"Your fathers, where are they? and

the prophets, do they live for ever?" And there reposed his fathers, as though they had never been,—"Where are they?" and Echo answers, "Where?"

> "Beneath the cold dead, and above the dark stone,
> Are signs of an empire that none may disown."

"And what account had they given? How had they improved the talent committed to their care? Had it been returned even with usury?" Such thoughts arose in the young and envied Duke of Ormanton's mind, as he stood over the ashes of the dead; and he resolved, with God's assistance, that he would never do discredit to his father's name, and earnestly prayed that he might be strengthened for future conflict. Such reflections had not made him sad, far from it. In looking upon all around him through this medium, he thanked God and took courage, and walked among his dependants as one taught of God. His most anxious wish was to secure a good chaplain, one to whom he could look up as a guide, and feel as a friend. He had no intention of establishing a Pope or a Jesuit in his house, but one whose character, conduct, and manner, by securing the respect of his household, would gain an influence over them. In the hope of accomplishing this end, he offered a considerable stipend and a comfortable suite of apartments

attached to the chapel, and connected with the house by a corridor. Although no mercenary motive would influence the man whom he would choose, he felt that he had no right to lessen the chance of respect which externals produce in common minds. "Dignity, and even holiness too, are sometimes more questions of coats and waistcoats, than some people imagine." His great desire was to meet with one who, with the soundest principles and spirituality of mind, would exercise his influence by a refinement in manner and feeling, and an independence of mind, so necessary to the faithful minister of Christ;—one who would not allow his faculties to be destroyed by the weight of a ducal coronet, and thus lose the remembrance of the superior dignity of the Royal diadem on high;—one whose manners would not expose him to the ridicule of the frivolous and vain, who forget, while they indulge in it, that they are ridiculing the representative of their Master in heaven;—one who, like St. Paul, would preach the truth boldly, the truth as it is in Jesus, the truth that sets free, the "form of sound words" which alone brings conviction to the heart. There were many candidates to a position offering such a sphere of usefulness, and which would be unattended with the sense of degradation and the contempt to which tutors and

chaplains are too often subjected, and which so sadly interfere with a faithful or advantageous discharge of their duties. Even if the person who holds it may be poor, the office he holds in either case commands respect and reverence; and parents and guardians may often trace the want of right feeling in those committed to their care in youth, to their own want of proper regard to those set over them. Where the parson and the dominie are the constant theme of ridicule in the parlour, the servants' apartments and the schoolroom will echo the same. All will respond, and the power of the words which are taught is destroyed. Ernest was fortunate in meeting with a man in all respects suited to that most important office. In Mr. Meredith he found an active coadjutor in every good work, one whose conduct was under the influence of refinement of mind and delicacy of feeling. None regretted his presence in the establishment. Though ever ready to take his part in society, he so entirely respected himself and the sacred office he held, that he never could be subject to impertinence or neglect. If the low-minded and vulgar, who think that whoever is paid is to be a servant of servants, and to lose all freedom of speech and ease of manner, occasionally slighted him, he passed it by as unworthy of regard, and only to be pitied in the

actor for the littleness of mind which could thus wish to wound. Like the sting of a wasp, which only produces inflammation in bad blood, so it passed him harmless, but would be returned by a just God, as such conduct always is, upon those who thus offend against the law of love to God and man.

While the spiritual interests of his household were the first to occupy his attention, no other part of the establishment was neglected: the stables, the conservatories, the gardens, the hot-houses, park, and table were all in accordance with his station and fortune. This he in no degree considered as choice, but as duty; and as such he performed it faithfully. Hunting and shooting were liberally provided for his friends; he took a full share in these amusements, not as the business of life, but as a manly exercise, and one which, when kept in subserviency to other claims, is in itself innocent. Although his horses were well cared for, he did not consider it necessary to pass his life in the stables, or to make them the subject of conversation at his dinner table. With his hunting coat he laid by the day's sport. His steward knew that he had a master who gave and expected integrity; and while liberality prevailed throughout his arrangements, it was with a regulation of expense which enabled him to owe no man any thing but love, and to

deal justly by all. He could feel that his carriages and horses were his own, that he might walk fearlessly among his tradespeople, that all might say as he passed, "There goes an honest man." If others would act as honourably, there would be fewer pauper coronets than there are now. Rank would not be made contemptible, as it often is, not by poverty, but by that which occasions it. Noblemen might maintain their independence, and the poor would look up to them. Little is known of the misery entailed upon thousands from lavish and unwarrantable expenditure of that which is not our own. For the sake of a name, and from the fear of offending, the tradesman gives credit; but if he is not paid, he cannot pay his workmen. The latter cannot obtain credit; the poor are always expected to pay ready money, and are often made to pay more, to make up for the deficiency on the part of the great. It is no uncommon thing to hear this urged by those who are disposed to be honest, as an excuse to put off payment. Thus the train is laid, and all do wrong; while those who willingly and cheerfully practise a virtuous self-denial rather than live beyond their income, are exposed to the ridicule of the thriving spendthrift: "a conscience void of offence towards God and man," is a far higher reward than the companionship of fools, who would be

the first to leave them in distress, when no longer able to minister to, or share in, their folly. "Be not made a beggar by banqueting upon borrowing, when thou hast nothing in thy purse: for thou shalt lie in wait for thy own life and be talked of[1]."

As soon as Ernest was established at Ormanton, his mother and sister joined him. It was with a feeling of real pleasure that he received them into his home, and that he sympathized in Mrs. Somerset's happiness, in seeing the fruit of all her prayer and watchfulness. In regarding her, under Providence, as the means of instilling into his mind the principles upon which all his happiness was founded, his filial affection increased tenfold. Instead of the mean jealousy which so frequently exists between parent and child, there was perfect confidence. He led her with affectionate *empressement* to the suite of apartments he had prepared for her, and which he wished her always to consider as her own. It consisted of an elegant boudoir, bed-room, and dressing-room, and opened upon a small enclosed parterre of flowers, where she might at all times enjoy privacy. Geraldine had not been forgotten. She had her own sleeping apartment and sitting-room, close to her mother's. Far

[1] Ecclus. xviii. 33.

from considering her as a check upon her enjoyment, her presence seemed to add security to her happiness. Cards were never seen at Ormanton, for Ernest had seen too much of the evil consequences of the amusement to think it safe to encourage it. What was merely a cheerful pastime in the drawing-room, might be differently regarded in the servants' apartments; and to him, as a faithful steward, their guidance was committed. Races he equally discountenanced. Though in themselves an innocent amusement and a pretty sight, the accompaniments make a sin of what under other auspices might be enjoyed without injury. From the highest to the lowest, all more or less influence by example; and the fear of leading others astray, will keep an upright mind from that which to themselves individually may be harmless. It is not the race, but the encouragement of vice, that is a sin. It is not the opera, but the lives of the performers and the immorality countenanced, which makes it objectionable. And if it is asked, as is often the case, why concerts are tolerated when the opera is condemned, although the same performers are present, the answer is, that the amusement in itself is perfectly unobjectionable, and attended with none of the vice or immorality which invariably belongs to the opera. Those who attend the one cannot be

answerable for the lives of the performers elsewhere. A concert in no degree conduces to sin or immodesty, and music is one of the highest enjoyments God has given us. We might as well abstain from a cathedral service, as none can say what the lives or occupations of many of the choristers may be elsewhere. It is not the music which is wrong, but the opportunities and accompaniments which too great freedom of intercourse occasion in scenes and acting. Professing Christians should never countenance any amusement which may cause the destruction of the souls of others, however they may feel unscathed themselves. This can be hardly the case with such an amusement as the opera or a theatre.

In writing of such amusements Massillon observes: "You continually demand of us if theatres and other *public* places of amusement be innocent recreations for Christians. In return I have only one question to ask you—Are they the works of Satan or Jesus Christ? for there can be no medium in religion. I mean not to say but what many recreations and amusements may be termed indifferent. But the most indifferent pleasures which religion allows, and which the weakness of our nature renders even necessary, belong, in one sense, to Jesus Christ, by the facility with which they ought to enable us to apply ourselves to more

holy and more serious duties. Every thing we do, every thing we rejoice or weep at, ought to be of such a nature as to have a connexion with Jesus Christ, and to be done to His glory. Now upon this principle, the most incontestable and most universally allowed in Christian morality, you have only to decide, whether you can connect the glory of Jesus Christ with the pleasures of a theatre. Can our Saviour have any part in such a species of recreation? And before you enter them, can you, with confidence, declare to Him that in so doing you only propose His glory, and to enjoy the satisfaction of pleasing Him? What! the theatres? such as they are at present, still more criminal by the public licentiousness of those unfortunate creatures who mount them than by the impure and passionate scenes they represent—the theatres are the works of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ would animate a mouth from whence are to proceed sounds lascivious and intended to corrupt the heart? Jesus Christ would preside in assemblies of sin, where every thing we hear weakens the doctrine, where the poison enters into the soul by all the senses, where every art is employed to awaken and justify the passion he condemns? Now, says Tertullian, if they are not the works of Jesus Christ, they must be the works of Satan. Every Christian, therefore, ought to abstain from them. When he

partakes of them he violates the vows of baptism. However innocent he may flatter himself to be, in bringing from these places an untainted heart, it is sullied by being there; since by his presence alone he has participated in the works of Satan, which he had renounced at baptism, and violated the most sacred promises he had made to Jesus Christ and to His Church [1]."

The great little consider how many are led astray by their example. "'A sore trial shall come upon the spirit of the mighty,' says the Spirit of God; for mercy will pardon the meanest; but mighty men shall be mightily tormented. Not that rank and titles are hateful in God's eyes, to which His favours are denied, and which of themselves constitute guilt. No; God is the Lord of the cedars of Lebanon as well as of the humble hyssop of the valley; He causes His sun to rise over the highest mountains as well as over the lowest and obscurest places. The great are even more natural images of His greatness and His glory, the ministers of His authority, the means through which His liberalities and generosity are poured out on His people. But still the sins of the great and powerful have two characters which render them infinitely more punishable in the

[1] Massillon's Sermons.

sight of God—the scandal and the ingratitude. The obscure and vulgar live only for themselves. Mingled in the crowd, and concealed by the abjectness of their lot from the eyes of men, God alone is the secret Witness of their ways, and the invisible Spectator of their backslidings. If they fall, or if they remain stedfast, it is for the Lord alone, who sees and who judges them; the world, which is unacquainted with their names, is equally uninstructed by their examples. Their life is without consequence; they may depart from the right path, but they quit it alone; and if they accomplish not their own salvation, their ruin is at least confined to themselves, and has no influence over that of their brethren. But persons of an exalted station are like a public pageant, upon which all eyes are fixed; they are those houses built upon the summit, the sole situation of which renders them visible from afar. They can no longer live for themselves; to their destruction or to their salvation is attached the destruction or the salvation of almost all those around them. Their manners form the manners of the people; their examples are the rule for the multitude; their actions are as well known as their titles. It is impossible for them to err unknown to the public, and the scandal of their faults is always the melancholy privilege of rank; for men willingly copy evil when held out by great

examples. How many unfortunate creatures perish in order to feed their pleasures and their iniquitous passions! For them alone the dangerous arts subsist; the theatres are erected solely for their criminal recreations; profane harmonies every where resound, and corrupt so many hearts to flatter their corruption; the works fatal to innocence are transmitted to posterity solely through the favour of their names and protection. It is to them we owe lascivious poets, pernicious authors, and profane writers. It is to please them that these corrupters of the public manners perfect their talents, and seek their exaltation and fortune in a success the only end of which is the destruction of souls. It is they who protect, reward, and produce them; who take from them, by honouring them with their familiarity, that mark of disgrace and infamy with which they would otherwise have been stigmatized[1]."

Such a view of the position renders the responsibility of the great a hundredfold greater than that of others; and it was a deep conviction of its awful responsibility that made Ernest so carefully avoid in himself all that might lead others astray. In assuming his ducal coronet he had not provided himself with a passport to sin, but to the means of more extensive good to all committed to his care.

[1] Massillon's Sermons.

Among other visitors at Ormanton, Lord Cornbury was one. He had long been sincerely attached to Geraldine Somerset; and it was with great pleasure that her mother gave her free and cheerful consent to their union. She knew that he was worthy of her daughter. The marriage was celebrated at Staunton; for though it might have been attended with more splendour at Ormanton, it would have occasioned much disappointment to those who had seen Geraldine from a child among them. Lord and Lady Davenport came to the Abbey for the wedding; and Mrs. Perkins no longer ventured to insinuate any design, or the vulgar epithet of catching, to Lady Geraldine Somerset. She was awed into silence. Had Louisa Delville been the bride elect, her tongue would have found an unceasing theme of animadversion.

Lady Davenport was exceedingly shocked at Geraldine's comparative indifference about her *trousseau;* and it was an enigma to her that her future sister-in-law could prefer a ride or a walk with her future husband to what she regarded a far superior happiness, the choice of a gown. She who had married for rank and riches, and whose husband had been thrown in as a necessary but most disagreeable part of the bargain, could not believe it possible that these weighed little in the scale with either Geraldine or her mother. The one they had

always possessed, and ambition formed no part of their truly feminine character. Her noblest ambition was to be "that Christian woman who, shut up in the circle of her domestic duties, rears up her children in faith and piety, divides her heart only betwixt her Saviour and her husband; is adorned with delicacy and modesty; sits not down in the assemblies of vanity; makes not a law of the ridiculous customs of fashion, but regulates those customs by the law of God; and makes virtue appear more amiable by her rank and example; one 'who hath not lift up her soul unto vanity,' but who, in the midst of the dangers of the great world, continually applies herself to purify it."

Such was Geraldine's noblest ambition, and in her future husband she had secured a friend and companion, who, instead of being set off by his coronet, was himself its richest jewel. Mr. Delville performed the ceremony in a most impressive manner. All who were present felt the sacredness of its nature, and both bride and bridegroom acknowledged from the bottom of their hearts that it was no light responsibility which they had taken upon themselves. Edith, who was present, was painfully affected by the contrast of the present scene with that of her own stolen marriage. While Geraldine was surrounded by loving friends, her marriage

sanctioned by her parent, the blessing given by one who felt to her as a second father, she had stood alone and unprotected, an object of suspicion to the clergyman, a doubtful example to her young maid, a runaway daughter before her husband's friend, and her conscience reproaching her for the present, and presenting a prospect of anxiety for the future. She had never so wholly realized the degradation to which she had exposed herself; and she silently and tearfully put up a prayer that her future conduct might prove that she had deeply repented of the wilfulness of the past, and that Algernon might never learn to despise her.

Louisa Delville and Matilda were Geraldine's bridesmaids. Many circumstances had induced Mrs. Somerset to wish it to be a quiet wedding. At the altar she stood over her husband's grave. She was losing her daughter, though she might gain a son. Her daily, hourly interest would be gone; she would henceforth be alone in the world; an object of interest and affection to her children, but no longer necessary to them. She might now cease to live for a world which had for many years been to her as a wilderness; for the minds of those advanced in life, more especially when saddened by affliction, can scarcely find companionship in the young, who as yet are in the morning of life. She had been—

"Like that fair tree whose tender boughs
Wave in the sunshine, green and bright,
Nor bird nor insect ne'er allows
To seek its shelter, morn or night.
My heart was young, and fresh, and free,
And near it came nor care or pain;
But now like that same tender tree,
When once rude hands its fruit profane,
Ill-omen'd birds and shapes of ill
Troop to its branches, crowding still;
And sorrows never known till now
Have cast their shadows on my brow.
A ruin is my heart become,
Where brooding sadness finds a home.
See those bright leaves fall one by one,
And *I*—my dearest hopes are gone."

It must be an effort to the sad heart to take a part in mirth; and though the joyous laugh will sometimes fall in a sweet cadence upon a wounded spirit, it gradually fades into the mournful strain of departed happiness.

"In darkness and in weariness,
The traveller on his way must press,
No gleam to watch on tree or tower,
Whiling away the lonesome hour."

But there is hope in the end, and Mrs. Somerset could see a light in the distance, and feel its influence. She was "serene in unappalled confidence."

CHAPTER XIII.

It is so long since we have met with cousin Armstrong, that we must for a while leave our more agreeable friends, and inquire a little into her proceedings. During Louisa Delville's visits to London she had called occasionally, and met her in society, but no intimacy had followed. Their circles of acquaintance were different; and where this is the case it is almost impossible, even when the wish may exist, to meet often. The visit becomes an excursion, an event out of the daily routine, and as such is an effort: whereas the constant opportunities of meeting which the occupation of the same ground affords makes frequent visits unnecessary; and while the friend in the corner is counting with jealous eyes the omissions, the acquaintance is scarcely conscious that perhaps no visit has been made after the first exchange of cards. Those who more or less live in seclusion or a small circle, who are perhaps not popular, though excellent and deserving, do not

make sufficient excuse for the claims upon others, who are sought by the multitude. A selfish feeling takes possession of their minds, and they become exacting and unjust. Mrs. Somerset was too high-minded to receive favours or pleasure from any whom she could not regard with love or esteem. Although Mrs. Armstrong's splendid balls, dinners, and *déjeuners*, were crowded by those who will go wherever there is any thing to be gained, she would never join in the heartless system pursued by the world of making use of people who are afterwards turned into ridicule, and who would scarcely be acknowledged if they were met under other circumstances. Her object for her children was society and friendship, and she would purchase no amusement at the expense of another.

To the great delight of some poor peeress too thankful for an opportunity of giving a ball to her friends free of expense, Mrs. Armstrong gave up her house, her purse, and herself into her keeping for the night. No expense was spared; the whole house was in an uproar for days. Mr. Armstrong was on no account to be permitted to send an invitation to one of his old friends. It would have been considered dreadful that any of those who were his daily and hourly companions, who had been his stepping-stones to his wealth, should intrude

their vulgar and unfashionable faces in so august an assembly as that which was to fill his house, and for which they had helped to pay. Their common names would have sunk into a breath in the mouths of those elegant gentlemen whose lips could only shape themselves to pronounce titles or names enrolled in the list of fashion. It was a question of a very agitating nature to the committee whether he himself might be allowed to appear in his own house; and on these occasions, he had sometimes found himself treated like a waiter, and on one particular festival, a lisping, idle, fashionable youth requested him to bring up more champagne [1].

After this initiation Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter were to be seen every where. Money worshippers surrounded them; and, but that the highest coronet had not been placed at Jane Armstrong's disposal, she might long before the season was over have signed and sealed a mercantile contract under the solemn, though utterly despised, name of marriage. She was a vulgar and illiterate but good-natured girl, inheriting a good deal of her father's shrewdness. She was not altogether blind to the nature of her position, and in her inmost heart despised it; but the amusement and pleasure it

[1] A fact.

afforded, added to the consciousness of the deficiency of all other right to enjoy it, reconciled her to its falseness, and she determined to make the best of it. At any moment she knew that she might buy a coronet, so that she was in no hurry to lose her liberty and the affection of which she was the object at home. With all her defects, Mrs. Armstrong was in her own way an affectionate mother to her children, so that they were not unhappy; and it was more ignorance and weakness, than any radical fault in her character, that had made her the victim of circumstances. All went on smoothly for some time, till observers whose interest sharpened their eyes remarked that Mr. Armstrong no longer looked the self-satisfied man he had hitherto appeared to be, that there was a nervous anxiety in his manner, and a restlessness betokening a mind ill at ease. His wife, too much engrossed with her imaginary consequence, did not perceive it; and he was of too little importance for his illness or death to excite any particular interest in those who would lose nothing by his absence or suffering.

Jane, who was attached to her father, was more quicksighted, and often watched him with anxiety. His having just completed the purchase of a villa at Roehampton, the new-furnishing of his London house which to all observers seemed still in the last fashion of the

day, the ordering a yacht, and other apparently unnecessary expenditure, prevented her from indulging in any suspicion as to pecuniary matters, but she thought her father must be ill. She frequently waylaid him on his return from the city, and anxiously questioned him. He, however, persisted in maintaining that he was quite well; and appeared so impatient and irritable, that Jane ceased to trouble him with her affectionate inquiries. Mrs. Armstrong was persuaded that he was only nervous, and to Jane's remarks upon his altered manner and appearance she said, "How, my dear, can you be surprised that it should be so, when you consider the great change in his position? Of course your papa does not feel at home. I myself feel very odd sometimes. You, Jane, don't know how different it is to be living in Belgrave Square, courted by all the fine people, to living in a small country town, trudging on the pointed stones, and quarrelling with your neighbours, who are angry because you are a little better off than they are."

"Well, mamma," said Jane, "I am not sure that we should not be happier, for these fine people do not care in the least for us. I overheard Lady Mary Sandon turning you into ridicule the other night; and when her partner asked her how her mamma allowed her to visit such vulgar people, she said, 'Oh, papa likes Mr.

Armstrong's good dinners; and though their parties may be pleasant, I take care never to see them if I meet them in society. Besides, papa told me to be civil because he owes money to Mr. Armstrong.'"

"Oh but, Jane, Lady Mary Sandon is a pert, disagreeable girl, and I do not care what she says or thinks. I know besides that she has not a penny, and nobody thinks any thing of any body who is not rich. To be sure, Louisa Delville is made much of, but then she is a friend of Mrs. Somerset's, and of course people are afraid of offending her son. I see nothing in her to like or admire, a poor milk-and-water looking thing."

"She is very good-natured too, mamma, and after all it is pleasanter to be liked for oneself than for one's money; and if Mrs. Somerset did not like Louisa, she would not ask her; and then all those fine people at the Abbey are mad about her. When I meet her out, I always see her with all the pleasant partners, while I never have any but half-ruined stupid lords, who treat me as familiarly as possible."

"Never mind, Jane; when you ride in a coroneted carriage all your own, you can look down on Louisa Delville. You may be quite sure that she'll trudge all her life upon the ground; and when the Duke of Ormanton and his sister are married, nobody will trouble them-

selves any more about Mrs. Somerset, stupid old thing as she is, setting herself up above every body. She'll find, like the rest, that when there is nothing to be got by her she'll soon be forgotten."

And away walked Mrs. Armstrong, casting a side look of self-satisfaction upon the reflection in the glass of her magnificent person.

Jane sat musing for some time, and, uneducated as she was in the true sense of the word, she could not help feeling that there was an essential difference between her mother and Mrs. Somerset, Louisa Delville and herself. She had a confused idea, that though the heartless lovers of the world with whom she lived might be money worshippers, there were others who could appreciate superiority in mind, manner, and refinement; and that Mrs. Somerset would never wish to be valued by such people as those who surrounded her parents. Jane's was not however a mind to dwell long upon such a subject. She was totally incapable of appreciating what was so far beyond the ideas in which she had been trained; so she prepared herself for her ride in the park, where her splendid horse, if not herself, would attract all eyes, more especially as it witnessed to the money-bags of its rider. The next night had been fixed upon for another grand ball, which, as the last of the season, was

to eclipse all that had preceded it. The family had retired to Roehampton for the day, all necessary preparations having been left to Gunter; Mrs. Armstrong would not have dared to venture an opinion on the subject. She was the slave and not the mistress of fashion, and as such, bound hand and foot as tightly as a fly in a spider's web. Her conversation was an echo, her dress a servile imitation, her manners exaggerated, totally wanting in nature or the ease which natural position always gives.

On the eventful day she and her daughter returned to London in time to dress for the first arrival. Mrs. Armstrong walked about in the highest state of excitement. Like Alexander Selkirk, she could say, "I am queen of all I survey," but not like him was she doomed to possess her honours in solitude. An audience and spectators were always wanting to complete her happiness. To be dressed, or furnished, or driven for personal enjoyment was quite unknown to her. Her neighbours' eyes were essential to her existence; without somebody to see, she would have been quite indifferent to the appearance of either herself or her house. Like all who live for display, there was little comfort or regulation in her establishment. The sense of refinement was wanting, and where this is the case the whole is always defective. The smallest house and the poorest peo-

ple have often a look of comfort and elegance, which the most splendid and magnificent dress or furniture never give without it. Taste and tact are not to be bought, and are, like all other qualities, a witness to the mind. Mind may be seen in the smallest and apparently the most unimportant matters; and, as symptoms, these lesser things require as much watching as the greater concerns of life. When the whole was in readiness, Mr. Armstrong had not made his appearance. This excited no surprise, as his absence would not interfere with either the enjoyment or the arrangements of the evening. The illumination was brilliant, the company aristocratical, the supper and lesser refreshments of the most *recherché* nature; Mrs. Armstrong was at the height of gratified vanity. It was in the midst of a valse that there appeared some confusion on the stairs; servants whispered to those nearest the door, mysterious looks were exchanged, and just as Mrs. Armstrong was listening with a smile of delight to some unmeaning compliments upon the splendour of her jewels from the mouth of one of the hopeful exclusives who were watching for Jane Armstrong's golden shower, the unexpected opening of a side door exhibited a strange-looking appearance: three or four men seemed to be carrying some heavy weight upon a flat tray. The heavy tread and loud tramping sounded

very unlike the delicate sandals, or light and noiseless bottines or pumps of the family domestics. "Take care, John," in a loud and coarse voice, grated harshly upon Mrs. Armstrong's sensitive ears. Shocked that her aristocratical guests should be offended by such uncourtly sounds, or thinking that some bale of merchandise was being conveyed up-stairs, for Mr. Armstrong was far from particular in his dealings, she rushed out with such vehemence that one of the supposed porters was thrown down, and by the impulse her husband's corpse was precipitated into the room. There it lay, a mutilated and disfigured body, a witness to the woe pronounced so fearfully by the prophet Amos: "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; and sell the refuse of the wheat? The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." Thus it had been with Mr. Armstrong; he had lately taken advantage of the ignorance of a poor widow to buy from her a piece of land for a very small sum, when he knew that another would have

given double for it. He had turned an aged man out of the cottage which he and his fathers had occupied for ages; he had secretly undermined the interests of an orphan; he had persuaded some poor relations whose pittance barely enabled them to live, to venture their all in some vain speculation; but while he had hoped to raise himself to a pinnacle of greatness, there was an eye upon him, and one voice raised which said, "So far shalt thou go, and no further." An extensive speculation in building had been the projected end of all this oppression, from which he expected to double his fortune. A violent storm, and a fearful inundation consequent upon an inroad of the sea, had blown down and destroyed a crescent which he had just completed at an enormous expense. A bank in which he had placed a large sum had failed, and a clerk had carried off all his ready money. Like Job, he had for some weeks daily heard of these different losses, and the fresh expenditures that he had ordered had been a blind to his creditors, this being a common trick among speculators, in the hope of retrieving their lost credit by fresh deposits.

On the day on which Mrs. Armstrong had decided to give her ball, he had returned home in utter despair early in the afternoon, with the full determination of preparing his family for the storm which had been so long gathering

over their heads, and of which they were wholly unconscious. Mrs. Armstrong had believed her husband's resources to be inexhaustible. She had never inquired into them; and if she had ventured to do so, no satisfactory information would have been given her. She had been accustomed to look up to her husband as gifted with unbounded talents for accumulation; and although she was equally expert in the art of expenditure, she considered it quite beneath her to interest herself in the secrets of the counting-house. Vainly hoping to meet with sympathy, Mr. Armstrong had turned towards the magnificent mansion which seemed to his altered eyes only a witness to his folly. The god to whom he had sold himself had deserted him in the hour of need. In watching for unjust gains, he had consumed himself. The relations whom he had beggared by delusive promises were clamorous. The widow, who, immediately after the sale of her land, had been apprized of the undue advantage which had been taken of her helpless ignorance, had loaded him with reproaches. The tears of the defrauded orphan had raised him friends who clamoured for restitution. The curse of the aged whom he had turned out houseless and destitute for ever sounded in his ear. Those who had urged him on by flattery and the praise of his worldly wisdom, now mocked at him, and reviled him for his want of

foresight. Those who had bowed to him with mean, cringing, and affected humility as the representative of wealth, now threatened him with a prison. His wife, who had been affectionate until she had been transplanted into the cold and ungenial soil of fashionable life, had learned to despise her husband, and regarded him as little more than a clever steward. His children were always engaged in the act of training for the ungrateful world to which their parents had sacrificed all their real happiness, and he knew not where to turn. There was no comfort for him—no good Samaritan poured oil upon his wounds. If he looked into himself he found no soothing voice. Gold had hardened his heart, it had seared his conscience, it had darkened his understanding. If he looked abroad, all was dark, cold, and dreary. There was none at hand

> "To turn the bitter pool
> Into a bright and breezy lake
> The throbbing brow to cool."

He had lived for the world, and the world alone, and his heart within him was desolate. What thousands would he not at that moment have given for one kind look, one friendly touch of the hand, one word of love!

He could fully respond to the sentiment expressed in the quaint but expressive lines of a fellow-sufferer:

"Earth builds on earth like glittering stars,
Earth says to earth, We are but mould;
Earth builds on earth castles and towers;
Earth says to earth, All shall be *ours*."

Castles and towers had alike fallen to the ground, and a smothering dust was all that remained. On his arrival in Belgrave Square he found the whole house in confusion. The floors resounded with hammers, loud voices assailed his ears, work-people were hurrying to and fro, the sickening smell of savoury viands, so unwelcome when the taste and appetite are gone, overcame him; and he sank down in despair on a chair in his entrance hall, that hall which would in a few hours be trod by bounding steps and light hearts. A compassionating charwoman, tempted at first to suspect him of evil designs, seeing his exhausted state and woebegone countenance, brought him a glass of water. Refreshed by the cooling draught, he took up his hat, which had fallen from his head, and rushed into the street. The man who a few days before walked with head erect and firm step, dressed in the extreme of fashion, scarcely condescending to notice his acquaintance unless they boasted of gilded coronets, now crept along with silent tread, choosing the most unfrequented streets, and envying the careless laugh of the meanest street-sweeper.

Hailing the first cab he met, he threw himself back so as neither to see or to be seen, and ordered the driver to the gambling-house. Excitement of some kind he must have, thoughts were dreadful, solitude intolerable. The present was unbearable, and to him there was no future in this world, for he knew no God but mammon.

On entering the miserable and destructive place of refuge he had chosen, he rushed to one of the tables prepared for its victims. He played high, and when he left off, as the clock struck two in the morning, he found himself many thousands poorer than he was before. He drank freely, and became almost frantic. One of his companions, less devoid of feeling than the others, offered to accompany him home; but he became quite furious, so much so that, without the intervention of the others, a quarrel would have ensued. He had been in the habit of carrying pocket pistols with him on his long walks at night from the different places where his gains were accumulating, and feeling for his handkerchief, he touched one accidentally. At that moment, the voice of him who is ever on the watch to destroy, suggested a remedy for all his misfortunes. It sounded on a willing ear, and touched the heart of one who from having all his life neglected prayer, had

no place of refuge. Drawing one out with vehemence, he exclaimed, "Ah, I have found a friend!" And putting it to his mouth, received the whole contents in his head. The sound of the pistol, the screams of the passengers, the shouts of the police, brought out the waiters of the gambling-house. One of the players merely observed, that they supposed that old fool Armstrong had made an end of himself, and all quietly resumed their unhallowed amusement; for nothing renders the mind and heart so utterly callous as gambling. The waiters soon recognized the mutilated remains as belonging to Mr. Armstrong, and he was conveyed on a shutter to his splendid and illuminated mansion. The servants, quite unprepared for so unsightly a vision, and wishing to conceal the horrible occurrence till the house was cleared, had desired the bearers to carry the body up the back stairs; and thus it was that Mrs. Armstrong's ears had been offended by sounds very unsuitable to her state of exalted vanity at that moment. And there lay the corpse of her husband, a disfigured mass, in the midst of the grandeur to supply which he had sacrificed soul and body; an object of horror to all, and of contempt in life and death to most of those who a few minutes before were revelling in the riches for which he had toiled in vain.

Mrs. Armstrong fell down in strong convulsions, and was carried to her room by the very men who had previously performed the same office with equal indifference for her husband. Jane was quite unconscious; the guests hurried away, too glad to escape from a scene of such misery, and thankful that the state of the case prevented the necessity of affected sympathy. The event, though a present shock, was nothing to them. Some even hastened to another scene of gaiety, where their story gained them more attention and importance than they were accustomed to receive. Others returned home vexed at the loss of their evening's entertainment, and wishing, if old Armstrong chose to take himself off so unceremoniously, that he would have chosen some less inconvenient time. Not one turned to say a kind word to his beggared widow,—not one tear was shed. "Armstrong is done up," was the burden of the conversation at the clubs next day. "What a good thing it is that his ugly daughter has not taken any of us in?" said another; "I was just on the point of proposing to her fortune last night, when we were all put to flight. It was not pleasant, certainly, to be interrupted in such a queer way." "Odious, vulgar woman, that Mrs. Armstrong," said a third; "it was all I could do to bear her, notwithstanding her capital dinners. To say the

truth, we have no great loss in any of the party."

"Only in the dinners," drawled out a fat youth, ensconced in a large and luxuriant arm-chair, who always declined or refused invitations, according to the prospect of a good, or what he called a bad, dinner; and who, having scarcely a tolerable lodging of his own, made a home of the club.

Thus the world regarded this awful catastrophe, and the Armstrongs were as much forgotten as though they had never been. Like the waves of the sea when it has swallowed up her dead, no sign remained of the drowning, struggling mariners, or of the vessel which bore them; but there were some who had seen little of them in their day of folly, who did not forget them in the hour of adversity. The cousin Delville, over whom Mrs. Armstrong had wished to triumph in her splendour, no sooner heard of her distress than he hastened to the chamber of sorrow. No unkindly feeling rested on his noble and generous heart. All her affectation of superiority, all her vulgar offers of assistance were forgotten, and he only saw an afflicted fellow-creature, and rejoiced in the hope of giving consolation. Mrs. Somerset cheerfully took her part in the work of mercy. Louisa was equally kind to

poor Jane, who had really loved her father, and mourned his death; while her mother was disposed to quarrel with him for having deprived her of all that she held dear. Mrs. Somerset, immediately on hearing of Mr. Armstrong's dreadful end, ordered her carriage, and drove to Belgrave Square. She found every thing in the greatest state of confusion. The house presented the most melancholy appearance. The bailiffs had already taken possession, and it was with difficulty that she made her way up-stairs, and found the wretched widow stretched upon her bed, still surrounded by all the magnificence in which she had delighted. With much difficulty she persuaded her to allow herself and her children to be moved to her house, where every preparation had been made for their reception.

Through the interest of her son and the kind exertions of Mr. Delville, the affairs were brought to a more favourable issue than could have been expected. When all the property was sold, and the enormous debts paid off, there was still one thousand a year left for Mrs. Armstrong, a sum which in former days she would have considered fully adequate to all her wants, but which, with her altered ideas, appeared little more than beggary. Her health had suffered greatly by the shock she

had received; and now that she had time to think, now that the sun of prosperity no longer blinded her eyes, or mystified her understanding, she remembered the years of affection in which she had lived with her husband, before fashion had taught her to despise him, and for the first time for many years a natural feeling returned to her heart. Jane remembered all the tokens of kindness which she had received from her father. His vulgarity faded from their minds. Of his speculations they had known nothing, but agreeable consequences in the pleasure which the money gained by them afforded; and his death had deprived them of all they cared for. In themselves they had nothing to recommend them. Fashion had stamped their gold, and when the metal ceased to exist, the same fiat which had given it currency condemned its former possessors to obscurity. They had neither connexion, beauty, refinement, nor education. It had been a coarse, ill-graven image, its weight and measure being its only passport into society. Had there been mind or delicacy of feeling, there would have been many who would have found pleasure in their society, many who would have loved them better in sorrow than adversity; but, in their case, the most charitable could only pity. There was no redeeming point.

Mr. Delville vainly endeavoured to lead Mrs. Armstrong to seek the "peace which the world can neither give nor take away." She could not understand the love or justice of a God who could thus suddenly hurl her from the pinnacle of vain-glorious happiness into the depths of despair. Although to a certain degree grateful for all the kindness which she received, her vulgar mind attached the idea of charity to all that was done for her, and she felt degraded. Instead of regarding the assistance of friends as the love of God conveyed through man, she felt it to be a pitiful condescension, and thus made it a pain to those whose only wish was to lessen the load of care which oppressed her. To them, love and charity were one, and what they did was as a witness to the truth in which they lived.

As soon as Mrs. Armstrong was sufficiently recovered to move, and all her affairs were arranged, she decided on going abroad, where her income would procure her more luxuries and more consideration than in England. Display was still her ruling passion, and she hoped yet to find means for its gratification.

She took leave of the friends who had shown her such devoted kindness, more with a sense of release from obligation and dependence, than with any feeling of gratitude. She judged of them by herself; and never having given the

smallest donation without parading her liberality to all her friends, and talking with a compassionating condescension of the poor creatures whom she thought it her duty to relieve, she naturally supposed that others would do the same. She knew nothing of the delicacy and refinement which makes a gift precious in the sight of the receiver. Such a feeling was utterly incomprehensible to her coarse and monied ideas. Her only idea was that all could be bought. To the great relief of Mrs. Somerset, she and her daughters set out for the Continent; where, in due course of time, Jane was successful in meeting with a penniless Romanist Italian prince; and her two sisters were equally fortunate, according to their ideas, in finding two Polish counts. It has been reported that Mrs. Armstrong also contrived to secure a French parvenu marquis, to whom her thousand a year seemed a most pleasing addition to his very small income. They never returned to England, or if they did, their birth, parentage, and name having been swallowed up in those of their august husbands, and their places completely filled up in the fashionable world, they were never heard of. Other lions and other victims had sprung up and disappeared, and they were as though they had never been:—

"So comes the reck'ning when the banquet's o'er,
A dreadful reck'ning, and we smile no more."

CHAPTER XIV.

Leaving Mrs. Armstrong to her fate, we now turn with more pleasure to Algernon and Edith, who were gradually emerging from the cloud which had for a time dimmed their horizon. Both had suffered much, but trial had not been sent them in vain. They were still young; the past could not be recalled, but the future was before them; and Edith had found an affectionate and sympathizing mother to whom she might communicate her hopes and fears, and from whom she could always receive judicious advice. In return, her whole heart was devoted to the alleviation of her suffering. The resolutions she had made in the hours of repentance she joyfully carried into effect, and she was in every sense a daughter to the parent whom she had once so thoughtlessly grieved. She was so conscious of her own deficiency, that she thankfully drew upon the rich and full stream of knowledge Mrs. Melcombe possessed, and which she imparted in so cheerful and im-

proving a manner. She had the peculiar faculty of winning attention, of gaining an influence, without appearing to do so; and though she spoke the truth in all its plainness, it was in so kind and gentle a voice, and with so much allowance for the prejudices and weakness of others, that she never gave offence, even if her words made no impression.

Edith had become the happy mother of two little girls, and her first object was to bring them up as children of God; while she carefully attended to all that was due to this world. Sensible of the serious defect in her own education which a total want of sympathy had occasioned, she resolved to be the friend of her children, so that, while parental authority should be upheld in all its force, it should still be an influence of love. She had necessarily much time to herself, which she devoted to them, instead of passing it in idle visiting and foolish gossipping. The claims of society were never neglected, but these, when not accompanied by the additional claims of an idle and vacant mind incapable of occupying itself, can be easily brought under rational control. There must be some rule and some determination to effect this desirable end; and those who reserve no hours for their own improvement, become at last like empty casks—noisy, without satisfying our thirst—occupying space, without being useful

or agreeable—equally uninviting, either for rest or enjoyment. Edith was conscious that she should often give offence by denying herself to idle visitors, whose repeated calls were more to pass time than to give or receive pleasure. All whose esteem and affection she appreciated, would only value her more for doing her duty. She had the pleasure of seeing her husband daily becoming of more importance. His brilliant talents, now under good regulation and application, had gained him the approbation of those high in office; his moral conduct, respect and esteem. The story of his marriage was little known; and to the few who knew all the circumstances which had accompanied it, his continued attention to his duties, both as a husband and in his profession, had made it indifferent. His name was frequently mentioned in society as a rising man, and he was advised to try for a seat in Parliament. The elegant and pleasing Mrs. Melcombe was not forgotten. Those who called upon her in the first instance out of compliment to her husband, soon returned out of regard for herself, and thus secured friendship when, if it had been otherwise, a common acquaintance only would have followed.

The wife always forms the home atmosphere. If vulgar and disagreeable, the husband's popularity will bring no advantages of society to

his children. Nothing more entirely influences the position of a family than the choice of a wife; and no man ever recovers a false step in this most serious decision. Caught by a pretty face or a ready wit, he forgets that the companionship is for life; that he requires a mistress for his house, a mother for his children, and a cheerful and pleasant hostess. The pretty face soon becomes familiar; the wit, which perhaps existed only in a quickness of repartee, appears pert and out of place; the manner common. This is brought before him by neglect and coldness on the part of his friends, and he is either reduced to the choice of accepting invitations alone, or of remaining at home from an amiable feeling. If the wife is *exigeante*, his popularity only adds to domestic discomfort. Her part is a difficult one. It is impossible to hide her treasure, or enjoy it alone; love will dig it up; and the only wise plan is to become a part in it by living in the satisfaction of seeing one so dear to herself appreciated and valued, and by endeavouring to be pleased by the kindness and consideration he meets with. Discontent and moroseness will only increase the evil; for where there is much to be gained, friends will crowd around. The attraction cannot be resisted; and it is better to benefit by the light that is emitted, than to endeavour to extinguish a flame which will only burn the

brighter by the pressure. This was Edith's sensible determination. Her husband's guests were never made to feel unwelcome; she received them with courtesy and kindness; she fully understood and appreciated all that made her house an object of resort; and if occasionally she might feel that a less public life would be more congenial to her mind, she checked the thought, and comforted herself by the conviction that it was better to be sought for by talent and understanding, than stagnant in folly or stupidity, or to be despised from the absence of character and conduct.

Under the judicious guidance of Mrs. Somerset, Edith had cultivated her mind. Her manner had lost the awkward shyness which a want of proper respect for herself had produced; her dress was simple and elegant, without finery or extravagance; and all her better feelings had been drawn out and elevated. She had experienced the effect of real religion on the character; and in the exercise of its cheerful duties, in its freedom from all bondage but that of love, she had found a pearl of great price. If she looked back with sorrow, as she frequently did, upon the way in which she had deserted her parents, it was no longer with its first bitterness. She trusted that deep repentance and an earnest desire to redeem the past would be accepted for His sake who has pro-

mised to forgive all who come to Him in humility, faith, and prayer; and while her increased knowledge in "the truth as it is in Jesus" made her more deeply sensible of her error, it conveyed with still greater force the sense of forgiveness. Far from encouraging her husband in a love of display, she ever endeavoured to impress upon him that it was wiser to live in moderation. She bade him remember that health and life are uncertain; and that as their income depended on him, it was more prudent to deny themselves while they were young, lest a rainy day might come. Her happiness was in him, and she had no wish to vie with others at his expense.

Since Algernon had emerged from obscurity, and secured an income which left no cause for fear of an attack upon her husband's purse, Lady Melcombe had suddenly become conscious that such a nephew was in existence—a fact of which she had hitherto been quite oblivious. If occasionally some of her acquaintance ventured to say that they had met a Mr. Melcombe, she would answer, in a supercilious and haughty manner, that it was quite impossible for her to remember all Sir Henry's cousins; and that indeed she could not think of encouraging his former city connexions. With her daughters growing up, it would be dreadful to have such barbarians hanging about her house, more es-

pecially as they were always sure to be handsome and artful. When she heard that Algernon had made a speech in the House which had gained him the highest praise, and found that he was becoming the fashion, she immediately changed her tone: she became suddenly sentimental. All her dear sister-in-law's trials were dragged before the public, and tears which the reality had never called forth flowed freely when her own interest was concerned. She expatiated upon the beauty of the dear sweet little boy she had remembered; expressed much surprise that he should have grown into a man, and that he should have made no attempt to see his dear uncle. Perfectly aware of all the particulars of his marriage, she had hitherto thought it her duty not to notice runaway girls, and she would never allow Edith's name to be mentioned; but now she made it a point to tell every body that her nephew had married a charming person, a daughter of Colonel and Lady Sophia Cumberland. She spoke of her mother as a lady of fortune, living in a handsome place in the country, surrounded with every luxury; and if any body ventured to say that they had heard she was a great sufferer, Lady Melcombe would ridicule the idea, and assure them that her long illness was of no consequence, for that every attention was paid her; that she was only nervous and fanciful; that being a widow was an

every-day affair, only that Maria was sentimental, and made such a fuss about it. She had never called her Maria before; but now she liked to appear to belong to her. She was so blinded by her own self-consequence, that she did not perceive how completely her meanness was exposed, and how much more beloved Mrs. Melcombe was in her humble cottage, which had been magnified into a palace, than the purse-proud, hard-hearted Lady Melcombe, who for years had witnessed her struggles without once stretching out a hand to help her. Algernon and Edith were too noble-spirited to resent her conduct; and though as indifferent to her attention as they had been to her neglect, they responded to her advances, not willing to be patronised, but ready to be acknowledged.

There are some people who have a peculiar love of patronising, and if the power is not borne with submission, they cease to be interested. Algernon needed no such support. He had made his way by his own talents, and the foundation was too real to need artificial propping. He had become too useful to be neglected, too ornamental to be slighted, too agreeable not to be sought, and Lady Melcombe had the mortification of finding that her smiles and condescension were wholly disregarded. Nobody cared about Algernon's relationships. Both he and Edith looked at home

in their present position, and none but the envious and the little-minded stopped to inquire where they came from or who they were. Sir Henry Melcombe, who had neglected his nephew, more from indolence and forgetfulness than from unkindly feeling, welcomed him with cordiality. He no longer dreaded their being troublesome, and this was all he had feared.

The continued estrangement of her parents was the only drawback to Edith's happiness; but she augured much from Algernon's success. She was well aware that disappointed vanity was the principal cause of her father's anger, and that to her mother she had been comparatively indifferent. They could not fail to see Algernon's name constantly in the daily papers, to see her own among the *élite* of the fashionable world; and though friends might be afraid to mention their names, they would be forced upon them. They had returned for a time to Langdale Park: Mrs. Watson was no longer there, to whisper her ill-natured comments, or interfere to stifle returning feelings of kindness. Mr. Watson's enervating and sentimental preaching had been exchanged for the sound doctrines of a well-instructed, well-read, and spiritually-minded man; and it might be hoped that Lady Sophia would be led to see the difference between

opinions and practical religion. Time had tempered asperity, and circumstances had changed. Algernon was no longer the unknown son of a poor widow; and though his talents had only added notoriety to a position which entitled him to take his place freely among the gentle born, the notice of the great had made him *the fashion*, and this would smooth away many difficulties. His establishment was in accordance with his increased fortune, while the good taste and refinement of his mind gave a grace to all around him. All these considerations operated in their favour; and while the right-minded would have rejoiced in the moral and religious improvement, the worldly mind of Colonel Cumberland only regarded the externals. A most deeply penitential letter from Edith opened the way. Mrs. Somerset and Mr. Delville were not idle, and used all their influence to induce Colonel Cumberland and Lady Sophia to forget the past and receive their children. Edith had dwelt much upon her desire to show her mother her grandchildren. This touched a chord in Lady Sophia's heart. She began to fancy that they might be an amusement to her: it would be a new attraction to her now dull home, something to enliven her monotonous existence. She thought that she should like to see them running on the lawn. Her natu-

rally selfish disposition made her alive to many advantages to be gained by the agreeable addition of such a man as Algernon to their society, and Edith had seen enough of the world to be able to amuse her; so that altogether she came to the conclusion that it would be a very good thing to ask them to Langdale Park. Curiosity induced Colonel Cumberland to wish the acquaintance of a man of whom every body had something to say; and he went up to London determined to see him, without making himself known. He secured a seat in the court at a celebrated trial; and when he saw Algernon's noble, manly, and independent bearing—when he heard his eloquent, elegant, and impressive oratory—when he heard the universal and unbounded applause which followed his pleading, he acknowledged to himself that he could no longer be surprised at Edith's having been led away by so superior a being, and in his heart he forgave her. Nothing but pride withheld him from going up to him and claiming him as his son; and Algernon, unconscious of his presence, could give no opening for the reconciliation. It was not, however, intended that the meeting should be long delayed; for he had been invited to a large dinner party on the same day, where, unconscious of any separation between parent and child, Lord Casterton also expected Algernon and Edith. He

arrived early, with old-fashioned punctuality. His long residence in the country had made him forget that in London seven means eight; and that nobody thinks of beginning to dress before the hour appointed for dinner. He found the drawing-room empty. A footman was making up the fire, and stared at him with unfeigned astonishment. The housemaid, who was putting the last finish to the folds of the curtains, regarded him as unworthy of notice, and continued her operations in an unconcerned manner. At last the door closed on both; and Colonel Cumberland threw himself into a most comfortable *bergère*, and taking up the newspaper, was soon completely absorbed in one of Algernon's eloquent speeches. Lord Casterton had been detained at the House, and Lady Casterton had remained in the Park long after the time when her guests were expected; so that nothing disturbed the solitude and silence which surrounded him. He had just laid down the paper, and was beginning to wish for some symptoms of dinner, when the door opened, and Mr. and Mrs. Algernon Melcombe were announced. To Algernon, Colonel Cumberland was quite a stranger. He had been absent from Langdale during the whole period of his stay at Vine Cottage; a circumstance which had greatly facilitated the elopement of Edith. Indeed, the total neglect

of his home duties had been in a great measure the cause of all his discomforts. If he had humoured Lady Sophia a little, and made more allowance for the injudicious indulgence of her father, and the absence of all control which her mother's early death had occasioned, Mrs. Watson would not have gained the influence she had. But he was an indolent man, one who acted upon the *laissez aller* system, who preferred peace to truth, and who dreaded any thing that entailed trouble or produced any personal discomfort. Rather than be exposed to a momentary ebullition of temper, he had allowed his young wife to have her own way till it was no longer in his power to check her folly. What in the early part of her nervous weakness would have been an easy task, had become more difficult every day; and he only discovered his error, when the fatal consequences of his carelessness were forced upon him by the disgraceful conduct of his children. As soon as Edith perceived her father, the past seemed all forgotten; she rushed into his arms and pleaded so earnestly for forgiveness, that Colonel Cumberland's pride gave way, and he pressed his repentant child to his heart with all a father's love. He was greatly struck with Edith's improved appearance and manner; and in the elegant and graceful woman before him could scarcely recognize the melancholy, awkward, and un-

happy-looking Edith Cumberland. It was not without a severe pang that the contrast presented itself to him, and he wondered how he could have left her so entirely without companionship or pleasure. She was much like her mother when he had first seen her, but with far more sense and expression in her countenance. The trials she had undergone had given a look of thought to her pretty and delicate features, a repose and dignity to her manner. There was something that spoke of inward peace, not arising from self-confidence or indifference, but from the experience gained by suffering. Her father little knew all the painful sacrifices she had made; how many hours she had passed in sad and anxious thought; all that she had suffered from the mortifications and irritability of Algernon, whose proud spirit had bitterly resented the neglect and insults which vulgar minds invariably heap upon poverty. Nor would he ever know it, for Edith had too much right feeling to expose her husband's failings. Even to Mrs. Somerset she had never spoken of them; and now that all was smooth and happy, now that he fully appreciated her, that she had regained her station and comforts through his exertions, she had buried all in oblivion, except the conviction that all her trials had been blessed to her—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown:
No trav'ller ever reach'd that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briers on his road;
For He who knew what human hearts would prove,
How slow to learn the dictates of his love,
That, hard by nature and of stubborn will,
A life of ease would make them harder still,
In pity to the souls his grace design'd
To rescue from the ruins of mankind,
Call'd for a cloud to darken all their years,
And said, 'Go, spend them in the vale of tears.'
But ills of every shape and every name,
Transform'd to blessings, miss their cruel aim;
And ev'ry moment's calm that soothes the breast
Is given in earnest of eternal rest[1]."

As soon as Edith had recovered from the violence of her emotion, she remembered Algernon; seizing him by the hand, she drew him to her father, and with a voice of earnest entreaty beseeched him to receive him as a son. Algernon was deeply affected; he remembered nothing but that Edith's father stood before him, and he freely received the hand which Colonel Cumberland offered him. At that moment, and before one word had passed, the folding-doors were thrown open, and Lady Casterton appeared, all smiles and courtesy. It never occurred to her to make any excuses for having allowed her guests to remain so long alone; but gracefully acknowledging them, she

[1] Cowper.

passed on, merely observing what a lovely day it had been. Under other circumstances Colonel Cumberland would have resented a *nonchalance* to which of late he had not been accustomed; for in his ancestral home he was always regarded as a kind of king: but the lapse of time had passed by unobserved, and Lady Casterton's *insouciance* totally unheeded.

It was a day of recognition, for Lady Davenport's was the next arrival. In the rouged, hard-featured woman who followed the announcement, Edith could scarcely believe that she saw the girl whom she had known as Catherine Mertoun. Dissipation had entailed its usual consequences. Late hours, the utter heartlessness of her existence, the total absence of mind, were all evident in her voice and manner. She looked much older than she was; and her poor miserable little husband followed in her train, more utterly insignificant than ever. She seldom condescended to notice him; and since her mother-in-law's death, had so completely gained the ascendancy which determination always secures over the weak, that the unfortunate captive never dared even to think otherwise than as her imperious ladyship intended. Like Lady Melcombe she had no longer any reason to withhold her acquaintance from Edith. Hitherto she had often met her in general society, but had always affected the convenient

blindness which is so often made use of by persons whose consequence is wholly dependent upon their association. Lady Davenport ought to have been above such littleness; but hers was not the proper respect due to her station, but the vulgar pride which feeds upon itself, and shows itself in assumption and haughtiness. All who were admitted into Lady Casterton's set were at once considered as established; so that Lady Davenport immediately acknowledged Edith, and requested to be introduced to Mr. Melcombe, and congratulated them on seeing that Colonel Cumberland was with them.

"All is as it should be now," she said; "the world will know who you are." At the same time she stared at Algernon, surprised at his noble appearance, and beautiful and expressive countenance. Edith felt that all that the world could give would not have tempted her to have sold herself as Lady Davenport had done; and her eye kindled with love and admiration when she contrasted Algernon with Lord Davenport. She was much disposed to tell Lady Davenport that she needed no support beyond that of her husband's name; but she restrained herself, merely observing, that it was a great pleasure to her to have met her father.

Lady Davenport was the mother of two girls and a boy; but in her eyes they were nothing

more than playthings to be dressed for exhibition, and excepting as an additional ornament to herself, she was very indifferent about them. Instead of being allowed the free use of their limbs, the unfortunate little creatures were encased in satin and velvet; and any attempt to run was immediately checked by the threat of severe punishment if the beautiful frock were spoiled. The exercise of their little voices, or the merry laugh, so necessary for the health of the young, was never permitted, because it was not *comme il faut*. At a certain hour every day, arrayed in their best clothes, and prettily arranged *en tableau* in the carriage so as to set Lady Davenport off to the best advantage, they were exposed to a broiling sun and a dusty road, and paraded in funereal procession in the Park, half blinded by the one and choked by the other. At other times they were placed before her as she sat upon a form in Kensington Gardens, the centre of attraction to fashionable dissipated men, whose conversation was wholly unsuited to childish ears—a want of discretion on the part of parents which leads many hereafter to practise sins which they have heard lightly spoken of as *faux pas*, little flirtations, and harmless extravagance; while all that is good is ridiculed, and pronounced prudery, dulness, and insipidity. The quickness and intelligence of young children is little regarded, and very

few people are conscious of the great importance of not speaking upon improper subjects before them. They understand a great deal more than is supposed; and draw very erroneous conclusions, not only to their own detriment, but often by repeating make a great deal of mischief.

It is no matter of surprise that old-fashioned husbands and wives no longer exist. If a man is seen as a constant companion and protector to his wife in her walks or rides, he is ridiculed as jealous. If, weak enough to be influenced by the opinions of persons whose praise would be the greatest dispraise that could be given, he allows her to go unprotected into a world where even simplicity of character cannot be understood, where good is evil spoken of, and the best affections destroyed or blighted, and she becomes the victim of the system, the husband is still to blame for not having taken better care of her. Thus the pure-minded and innocent, from ignorance of the wickedness which lurks under a fair exterior, often fall into a snare of which they know not the nature, until they are so entangled in its toils that escape is impossible.

Not content with exhibiting them in the morning, Lady Davenport's children were constantly dragged late at night into crowded assemblies, where they were exhausted in spirit and wearied in body, all attempt at real amuse-

ment being checked. They appeared, with the other melancholy victims of the same injurious system, like so many dolls, wound up by machinery to move in a certain space for a certain time. Those only whose performance could gratify the mother's vanity were permitted to dance; so that the others reclined listlessly and half asleep on the couches and chairs which surrounded the room, anxiously watching for the time when their more fortunate companions would be sufficiently tired to allow of their going home.

It was about three weeks after the dinner at Lord Casterton's that Edith heard of the death of one of Lady Davenport's little girls. The child, who was only four years old, had been for some time in a delicate state of health, which had been considerably increased by the measles. A severe cold, consequent upon a too early exposure to the air, had followed, notwithstanding which, she had been forced to practise daily a new Polish dance, in which a select number of victims were to exhibit at a grand fête to be given by one of the reigning queens of the fashionable world. She had been obliged to remain in bed the greater part of the day, and complained of headache and heat; but Lady Davenport, persuaded that she was only lazy, ordered her to be taken up and dressed in a magnificent fancy dress, her chest

exposed to her waist, and her little legs encased in the finest silk stockings, so as to leave it doubtful whether they were covered at all. The suffering babe patiently submitted. She was duly admired and praised; a little wine and water gave her artificial spirits; and when the carriage drove to the door, Lady Davenport expressed herself much satisfied at the superior sagacity which, in opposition to the better judgment of the nurse, had pronounced her child well enough to take her part in the evening's entertainment. On their entrance into the brilliant and well-lighted rooms, every body was enchanted with the lovely appearance of the three children. The little Emily in particular attracted universal admiration. Her lovely blue eyes, shaded by long dark eyelashes; her dark chestnut hair, with a tinge of gold, falling in the richest ringlets on her glowing cheek and snowy neck; the pretty delicate features, and lips of rosy hue, just showing her pearly teeth; the sylphlike figure, and tiny hands and feet, set off by sky-blue velvet trimmed with silver—gave her an appearance of spirituality, and all eyes were fixed on her. Her mother's triumph was short; for the sudden blaze of light and the large assembly of children so excited her weakened nerves, that she burst into a loud hysterical scream, and fell insensible on the floor. Every endea-

vour was made to restore her sufficiently to enable her to take her part in the dance. Lady Davenport persuaded herself that her faintness only proceeded from excess of enjoyment, which had produced too much excitement; and even carried it so far as to scold her, and desire her to exert herself. Vanity had so completely blinded her, and her disappointment was so great, that she became unjust and irritable. Still the decree had gone forth, and a tenderer Hand was ready to carry this little one into a more genial atmosphere, and plant it in a more fruitful soil. The servant who had accompanied the children, that Lady Davenport might have no unnecessary trouble, took her home. The carriage had driven off; and mothers, persuaded, from the scarlet appearance of her skin, that she had some dreadful fever, were afraid to offer theirs, so that a coach was called. The nurse, devoted to her charge, of whose illness previous to her dressing for the ball she was fully conscious, wrapped her in shawls, regardless of her splendid attire, and conveyed her tenderly to the bed from which she would never spring again into her arms.

Lady Davenport was more vexed than alarmed. Ensconced in her pride she deemed it impossible that death would dare to enter so unceremoniously into her house, and entertained her neighbour with an account of all

the coddling Lord Davenport forced her to use with her children, in which he was seconded by the nurse, who spoiled them dreadfully. The governess was just as bad; and it might have been supposed that she was the victim of a conspiracy. In this way she soon forgot the child, whose place was filled by another; and, interpreting the silence with which her remarks were met for consent, she contemplated her other children with much self-complacency, and comforted herself with the idea, that they were not such weak, nervous, silly things as Emily. The evening passed off much to her satisfaction. If she thought of the little sufferer at home, it was with a feeling of irritation at her childish weakness in being so easily overcome. In that very small portion of the creation which calls itself the world, feelings have no place; and the few who have not sufficiently schooled their hearts as well as their manners, are apt to be regarded as a burden on society. It is true that when unable to contribute to the general amusement of an entertainment, we are not justified in intruding our sorrows upon those who, from having no part in them, can scarcely appreciate our depression; for "if a person labouring under any afflictive feeling be well enough at ease to go into company, he gives a sort of pledge that he is so far recovered of his wound, or at least can so far

conceal his pains, as to behave like the rest of the circle. Men frequent society not to pour out their sorrows or indulge their unwieldy joys, but to interest or improve or amuse each other by rational and cheerful conversation." But there are sorrows which decency and common feeling ought to recognize, and to drive them away by reckless levity hardens the heart and injures the mind. Lady Davenport returned home much satisfied with the incense of flattery and praise offered to her on her children's performance. The little ones, excited by the scene, and by the unusual supper and wine which had been heedlessly given them, were in high spirits, more especially as mamma was in particularly good humour, and for once allowed them to enjoy themselves freely. On entering the house she carelessly inquired for Emily; and hearing that Dr. Latham had seen her, and had ordered her a warm bath and other remedies, and that she was tolerably quiet, she retired to bed, having tenderly kissed the two who had ministered to her vanity, secretly hoping that Emily's nerves would become stronger. The sweet and lovely child in the mean time lay tossing and tumbling all night in a raging fever, and towards morning became delirious and so alarmingly ill, that on Dr. Latham's arrival he pronounced the case hopeless. Lady Davenport was aroused from a

late morning sleep, and having taken full time to arrange her *demie* toilette in the most becoming style, she walked in her usual stately manner to the little crib in which the sufferer lay. The child gave her one look, and turning to her nurse smiled sweetly on her and nestled in her bosom. As yet, no softening feeling had touched the mother's heart. She was more angry than sorry. Nothing would persuade her that her little girl was dying; and she quarrelled with Dr. Latham, and desired that another physician might be sent for. Lord Davenport, who was more weak than heartless, and who had of late found amusement in his children, was quite overwhelmed; but neither knew any thing of the consolation which can alone give peace to the wounded heart. In her delirium the little Emily constantly raved about lights and dancing and music, and piteously entreated to be carried home. She seemed to imagine herself surrounded by great painted dolls, declared that they stared at her, and that she saw horrid-looking men: then she would scream till she was exhausted. For many hours she continued in this dreadful condition. Conviction had at length forced itself on Lady Davenport's mind, and she was horrified. She sat like a stone at the foot of the bed, concealed behind the curtain, for every time the eye of the child rested on her mother her

screams redoubled. She was easily persuaded by the governess to retire ; for, unaccustomed to death or any real scene of woe, she was quite incapable of exertion. In a few minutes after she had left the room a deathlike stupor stole over the little Emily. She lay like a breathing statue, till at length, opening her eyes, she recovered her consciousness ; and seeing the first glimmerings of the rising sun stealing through the closed curtains, she pointed to its rays with rapture, and, smiling with that heavenly smile which seems in the dying to proceed from some secret and glorious vision of the unseen world, she gently sank into the sleep of death. "It is hard to take to heart the lesson that a child's death will teach ; but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and a mighty, universal truth. When death strikes down the innocent young, for every fragile form from which he sets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some gentle nature comes. In the destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power ; and his dark path becomes a ray of light to heaven [1]."

[1] Old Curiosity Shop.—*Dickens.*

It does indeed seem strange that such should be born but to die; and yet how far happier a lot it is! It is only a selfish feeling which can mourn over the death of a child; yet it is hard to part with what is so dear to us. It seems a part of ourselves already in the grave; and while we cheerfully resign our treasure into God's hands, we must feel that part of our life is gone for ever, and that another and a strong tie links us to that world where sorrow is unknown. "La jalousie qu' inspire un mort est un sentiment plein de délicatesse et de vérité. Qui pourrait en effet triompher des regrets? Les vivans égaleront-ils jamais la beauté de l'image céleste que l'ami qui n'est plus a laissée dans notre cœur? Ne nous a-t-il pas dit? Ne m'oubliez pas. N'est-il pas sans défense dans le sanctuaire de notre âme? Et qui, parmi les heureux de ce monde, s'unirait jamais à nous aussi intimement que son souvenir[1]."

It was a considerable time before Lady Davenport could believe it possible that such an event had really happened to herself; and when the reality forced itself upon her, she gave way to violent fits of passion, reproaching all around her with neglect and inattention, accused Dr. Latham of having misunderstood the case, and

[1] De Staël. Allemagne.

Lord Davenport of having been the cause of the illness by injudicious care and over-watching. Every body was in fault but herself. In this way she expended her feelings, grief it could not be called, and gave strict orders that the other children should only be told that their sister was asleep, and was going into the country. She desired the servants not to admit Mrs. Somerset, who called repeatedly, alleging that she would fill the children's heads with ridiculous and melancholy notions; and lest any sad impressions should be made upon them, they were sent to Brighton, where, in the novelty of the scene, their little companion was soon forgotten. If they expressed surprise at her continued absence, they were told, that they were not to expect her for a long time, for that she had been taken to another home. Another splendid funeral left Lord Davenport's mansion. Age and youth had been confounded: the first had completed a life of vanity, the other mercifully delivered from a similar existence.

> "E'er sin could blight or sorrow fade,
> Death came with friendly care;
> The op'ning bud to heaven convey'd,
> And bade it blossom there."

A round of dissipation recommenced as soon as custom would allow. The intervening time

had been passed in touring, so as to leave no moment for thought, for Lady Davenport had no mind to fall back upon. She lived upon a surface; and if she had attempted to fathom the depths of the abyss on which she sported, she would have sunk into hopeless despondency. Like thousands, the absence of all reflection prevented sadness. Hers was not the cheerful flow of spirits enjoyed by

> "The gifted soul, whose inward sense
> Can pierce the fount of God's bright effluence;"

nor "the calm," we find, "deep in the centre of a balanced mind;" nor "that peace which passeth all understanding;" but it was the reckless merriment of excitement, an insensibility to all passing events, and a determination to let nothing interfere with the gratification of her vanity. Upon this passion she had fed from her earliest youth; and as long as it received fresh nourishment it satisfied her wholly. She never looked forward to the day when beauty would pass away, when visions would fade and friends grow cold, when newer faces and younger forms would take her place, when beauty

> "forgets
> The charms that she wielded before;
> Nor knows the foul worm that it frets,
> The skin which but yesterday fools would adore,
> For the smoothness it held, or the tint which it wore."

As long as the sun shone she basked in it; but though she might close her eyes and even dance upon her grave, the day must come when it would claim its own, and another would fill her place.

She soon regained her usual spirits. The temporary gloom necessarily cast around her disappeared. A handsome tablet announced the name, age, and date of her child's death, and the little Emily was as though she had never been.

Far different was the lot of Edith's two happy little girls; with every attention to propriety, their dress was suited to their age. Their daily runs in the Park, near which Algernon's improved circumstances now enabled them to live, gave them rosy cheeks and healthy limbs. The cheerful influence of a happy home, the tender but regular discipline which real affection suggests as alone productive of good, their early hours, regular meals, and the constant and careful direction of their minds towards all God's gifts, and to Him as the Author of all their pleasures and enjoyments, had given them minds and bodies equally healthy. They were not kept for hours poring over dull and heavy books; but no opportunity was neglected of conveying instruction in a light and pleasant way. During the many hours of her husband's absence, Edith found no amusement so agreeable

as that of teaching her children, and no interest so great as that of training their minds in the path of uprightness. It was fortunate for Algernon that he had not rested his hopes on his succession to his uncle's property; for, to the great surprise of every body, Lady Melcombe presented Sir Henry with a son and heir, just as his youngest daughter had attained her twelfth year. Her happiness was unbounded; and she almost forgave Captain Melcombe for not having married the ugly heiress, when she had the satisfaction of knowing that his son would not be her husband's heir. Judging of Algernon's noble and generous spirit by her own mean and avaricious disposition, she had ever feared his resenting her neglect and ill-conduct when he became the possessor of Sir Henry's property. Edith felt no pain in the prospect of communicating the event to her husband on his return from his daily duties. No worldly distinctions could increase her happiness, or make her husband more respected by any but the vain and frivolous. His early indiscretions had long since been forgotten; he had gained by years of consistency what is far beyond riches, "a good name;" and this would be a sure inheritance for his children, should he not leave them one in this world. He had for many years ceased to think of himself as his uncle's heir. He had enough to provide freely

for the comfort of his wife and children, and to add to the small income of his mother, who, as soon as she was no longer under the necessity of assisting her son, had nobly resigned her pension, conscious that there was many a poorer widow than herself. Lady Melcombe was considerably disappointed at finding that Algernon and Edith received the intelligence of the birth of her son with so much indifference, and still more surprised to see them welcome the little stranger with evident and unaffected kindness, when, attired in satin and lace, it was presented to them on its christening. Far from regarding the unconscious object of his mother's pride with any ill will, Edith received it in her arms with affection and interest, and secretly offered up a prayer that he might indeed and in truth become "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Lady Melcombe remained in the full conviction that they had acted their part remarkably well; and, conscious of what her own feelings would have been under similar circumstances, she endowed them with the same. Happy in each other, they returned to their cheerful home in Hyde Park Terrace, where the joyful faces of their sweet children greeted them with unmingled delight. As they looked around their comfortable, if not splendid rooms, they felt no regret; and Edith's heart bounded with delight

and thankfulness in the conviction that she owed all she possessed, under God's blessing, to her husband's exertions for her sake, and his desire to prove how deeply he had regretted the past. She far preferred his present laborious position to seeing him what he might have become had his propensity for extravagance been indulged, an idle, dissipated baronet, or a miserably disappointed heir, who in a life of expectation had involved himself in inextricable difficulties. He was in no fear of bailiffs and duns following him to reclaim money borrowed on false hopes: no distress of mind at unpaid debts would interfere in his enjoyment of home. He had been prudent, not living to the full extent of an uncertain income, but denying himself all indulgences which he could not honestly pay for, and wholly seconded by his wife, who, under the direction of Mrs. Somerset, had become an excellent manager, taking care to provide necessaries, and leaving luxuries to take care of themselves. By "not making haste to be rich," they had every promise of having far more than they desired, excepting as a means of benefiting others. The only drawback to their happiness was the increasing illness of Mrs. Melcombe, and the consciousness that the anxiety of mind occasioned by their thoughtless and cruel conduct had much conduced towards her present state of suffering. It was evident

to all around her that her days of cheerful and patient endurance of sorrow and sickness were drawing to a close. Louisa Delville was unremitting in her attentions; her younger sisters took the greatest pleasure in placing a daily bouquet of the choicest flowers on her breakfast-tray, and the delicate bantem's eggs from their own particular and favourite hen. They would creep in silently by the back door, that no sound might disturb the invalid, and then return to the faithful Jane to ask whether her mistress had been pleased and able to enjoy their offering of love. It being early in the year and new laid eggs scarce, the little Delvilles searched all the neighbouring farm-houses, cheerfully resigning their own share that Mrs. Melcombe might not be conscious of deficiency. Mrs. Somerset was a daily visitor, and the kind hand of affection never failed to bring the earliest delicacies of the season, in the hope of tempting the failing appetite, and well knowing that her suffering friend would never think of them for herself. It was seldom that she could benefit by them, but she received them with pleasure as proofs of love. It warmed her heart, and made her feel that she had yet affections on earth, though her highest and best were in heaven. "Fruit ripens, and flowers blow in sunshine, while both wither and die in frost." So it is with the heart; it expands under the

genial influence of tenderness and sympathy towards God and towards man; towards God as the Author, and man as the visible dispenser of His gifts. It increases humility in a right feeling mind, by the consciousness of unworthiness; and adds to wonder, love, and praise towards the Almighty power who thus magnifies Himself in his creatures. The calculation which thinks it right to withhold extra kindness from pain and suffering, under the pretence of seeming to give it too much importance, is unworthy of the true Christian. Such feelings are the effect of a naturally cold disposition, thus sheltering itself under a pretended duty, while it is gratifying its own indifference to the sufferings of others.

Spring had gradually unfolded its treasures; the birds sang sweetly: "The morning flowers displayed their sweets." But no spring of life would arise to Mrs. Melcombe. The same sun that made nature so bright was parching to her. The air that shed so balmy an influence on all around was cold and blighting; "Decay's effacing finger" had marked her for its own. She was as a flower that retains its leaves and looks fresh till a rude blast assails it, when it suddenly falls to pieces and dies. It was after a day of unusual suffering, that she had been carried on her couch into the garden. The evening was calm and peaceful; the sun was

slowly sinking into the glowing west, a cool breeze had succeeded a day of such intense heat that it had occasioned Mrs. Melcombe great exhaustion, and it was with difficulty that she was prevented from fainting. Mrs. Delville was watching her faded form and sunken eye with a gentle and loving look. She saw the traces of a great sorrow in her worn and pale face, but resignation had left no sign of passion. It was

> "A soul at peace with God. Now high,
> Now low, upon the gulf of life
> Raised or depress'd, in peace or strife
> She dreads no storm, she fears no grave;
> To her the world's tumultuous roar
> Dies, like the echo on the shore."

She had wearied none with complaints, conscious that continued sickness or trials like chronic diseases cease to excite sympathy in the multitude, and must be borne in silence. She "communed with her own heart and was still." If any had desired to insult or injure her, she had forgiven them. She pitied and prayed for them; for those that can take pleasure in adding "trouble to the heart that is vexed" are indeed objects of compassion, and as such Mrs. Melcombe felt them to be.

Louisa, who was unremitting in her affectionate attention, and who was as much at home in the chamber of sickness or sorrow, as

in the gayer scenes in which her youthful spirits inclined her occasionally to take part, was reading to her, when she looked up, and with a trembling voice expressed her wish that Algernon and Edith should be sent for. An evident change for the worse had taken place, and Mrs. Delville felt the painful conviction that her days must be few. A despatch was immediately sent to her son, who lost no time in obeying the summons; his grief much aggravated by the feeling that his unkind and inconsiderate conduct had shortened her life. Edith followed with her children, whom she left at Langdale Park with Lady Sophia, who had for some time been completely reconciled to her daughter. In many respects her character had greatly improved, since the baneful influence of Mrs. Watson had been removed. Her present rector, Mr. Herbert, besides being a real gentleman, was a very different man to his predecessor; so that though Lady Sophia was too weak, and her early education had been too much neglected, for her ever to be a superior character, she had become more practical and less talkative in her religion. Since she had attended more to her duties as a wife and a mistress of a family, she had found less time to interfere with the affairs of others. By taking a more active interest in her village and schools, she had become acquainted with real sorrow,

poverty, and sickness, and had thus learned to feel with others, and to wish to alleviate suffering as much as she could. Her grandchildren were allowed to be happy, and experienced none of the neglect of which her daughter had been the victim. The danger now was lest she should err on the side of indulgence. While Edith gladly permitted her mother to enjoy their society she did not sacrifice their real good, but silently influenced her children without lessening their respect or affection for their grandmother. It is dangerous to trifle in so important a matter; and young persons should never be sacrificed to those who prove by their allowing them to do what is bad for them, that their own amusement, and not the good of those intrusted to them, is their object.

This is too often the case in the world, and many a child is the victim of a false deference to the wishes of others. A childish entertainment is given. There must be a certain number to make it complete; and if any parent with some degree of moral courage dares to decline the invitation, offence is immediately taken; while others, who, in the innocent conviction that the presence of their own particular children is especially desired, sacrifice their own feelings to gratify a selfishness which is totally indifferent to any thing but the wish

to see rooms well filled. The children, excited by lights and company, and the feverishness consequent upon unusually late hours, are carried away by their spirits, and are guilty of what is considered bad manners. Their childish offences are magnified, their thoughtlessness turned into premeditation, and the character attached to them in infancy by jealousy and ill-nature remains to them for life. How often do we hear repeated from mouth to mouth, "Oh, that is the boy I saw get drunk at Mr. D.'s," or "That is the girl, I remember, such a dreadful flirt;" and the more after-conduct releases from such aspersions, the more zealously does malice spread its early reminiscences, not with any real regret, or any wish for the good of its object, but simply with the desire of lessening merit in others, and of elevating its own. The reward of doing well must not be expected in this world. Success only produces enmity and detraction; and after years of labour in the earnest hope of seeing "our sons grow up as the young plants, and our daughters as the polished corners of the temple," the only return is envy. Those only whose end is God's glory and not their own, can realize the blessing. To them there will be no weariness, no disappointment, no blighted hopes. Their desire is to God, and to Him alone they turn for comfort

and support. The impotent rage of malice passes them harmless, for "the arm of the mighty, their God is their guide :"—

> " Still, still shall the pilgrim ascend on his way,
> And patient endure the fierce heat of the day,
> And faint as descending the valley I seek,
> My spirit is firm, though my footstep is weak."

"God works in a mysterious way," and often by the very means which to our weak sight seems to extinguish us, brings out things new and old. All great things commence by the work of destruction. The sculptor's marble is a shapeless mass. The painter's colours are a strange medley. The agriculturist fearlessly leaves his seed apparently to rot in the ground. The architect heaps his materials, and all seems confusion. Yet out of each arises finished workmanship. Even in the more common and daily concerns of life, the same is visible. The unpractised eye recognizes no dress in the torn silk or strange patterns; the delicate viands which cover our tables are quite incompatible with the unpleasant ordeal to which the initiated artist has subjected them. Who would know the dark and dreary assembly-room in its hours of preparation, to be the brilliant and elegant ball-room of the evening? So it is throughout; and while man in his ignorance sees nothing

but destruction, God in His mercy is turning all to good. The evil passions of others are a lesson to ourselves. Envy and detraction, if received in a proper spirit, however undeserved, make us more watchful over our hearts, more careful to avoid all appearance of evil: for it is not enough that our conscience acquits us; for, as has been well observed by an old writer, "They that rest only in the testimony of their own consciences, and contemn the opinion of other men, deal weakly and improvidently for themselves, in that they assist not their consciences with more witnesses; and they deal cruelly to others, in that they provide not for their edification by the knowledge and manifestation of their good works."

"Certainly," says Dr. Donne, "he that hath not some desire of praise, will be negligent in doing praiseworthy things." That is the praise of the really good, not of the opinionated and self-willed, whose rule is, "not what is right or wrong, but do you do as I do." Watchfulness shows us hidden pools into which the pure stream might otherwise have carelessly fallen, and have become polluted. Disappointment in the encouragement and approbation we had hoped to meet with, turns our hearts to God. It teaches us to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and to rest alone in Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Neglect forces to independence, and by obliging us to seek for occupation, enables us to be happy alone, one of the best lessons we can learn. The stricken deer retires to its lonely corner, and it is not uncommon for the strong and healthy to attack and destroy the sick and weak. Though human beings may not actually destroy, the sick and weak are too often regarded as burdens, and whatever they do will never please. Society and the companionship of genial minds is one of God's richest blessings; but the necessity of being always in company, without regard to its nature, leads to half the wickedness which exists, alters the sacred character of home, and fritters away our best feelings. He who can say with a holy man of old, "I am never alone, for I have always one in my cell," is the truly happy man. He exchanges the noise and tumult of an ungodly world for the secret communion of angels:—

> "Heaven to that gaze shall open wide,
> And brightest angels to and fro
> On messages of love shall glide,
> 'Twixt God above and man below."

CHAPTER XV.

Day after day Algernon and Edith watched their dying mother with the tenderest love and care. Sickness did not render her peevish or unthankful. She felt that the desire to please deserved a kind return; and though seldom able to profit by the many things love provided for her, she never allowed those around her to suppose her indifferent. Hers was a meek and patient spirit. She had none of the contemptible pride which rejects kindness from the dislike of obligation. On one occasion when poor Jane, her faithful attendant, accidentally upset the table prepared for the requirements of the night, instead of irritation at her carelessness, or disappointment at the loss, she simply observed, with a sweet smile, "I am so sorry, my good Jane, because I know that you are vexed[1]." She had "set her house in order," and her life had been one continued

[1] A fact.

preparation for eternity. In the exercise of every Christian duty towards God and man, she had put all her trust in her Saviour. While she devoted the greater part of her income to the good of others, she regarded almsgiving as no ground of salvation, but simply as a witness of her love to God. Faith and prayer were her only anchors: love the essence of her being. Since she had been transplanted into a more genial soil, her spirit had revived; and though the loss she had experienced could never be replaced by any earthly affection, she could take pleasure in the happiness of others; and by thus living out of herself, many a reflected beam warmed her heart. Her own disappointments had not soured her feelings. It might be night in this world to her, but she knew that to others the day had not declined, and she would have thought it wrong to cast an early shadow upon the short-lived hour of enjoyment: "When God sees fit He sends the trial," was her constant observation; and when the time of trial comes, He gives strength. The prepared mind is never taken by surprise; and thus, like soldiers trained by regular discipline, is ever ready for whatever duty or suffering may require from it. The great mind rises with difficulty, while the weak sinks. The time of action is the season of strength. It casts off present impressions, so as not to

intrude them needlessly upon others, or allow them to interfere with usefulness, and boldly facing reality, calmly awaits the blow, in sure and certain hope, that "whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side."

The prospect of Mrs. Melcombe's death cast a sad gloom upon the cheerful party at Staunton. She was greatly beloved. Her chamber of sickness, far from being resorted to merely out of compassion or compliment, either of which give no pleasure to the simple mind or warm heart, was regarded as the crowning enjoyment of the day. Every thing interested her. Her naturally refined and cultivated mind gave a singular charm to her conversation. She had the happy art of intermingling instruction and amusement, life and fun, without losing reverence; and so sympathizing with the young, that their hearts opened towards her. By listening to the recital of their joys and sorrows without ridicule or hasty condemnation, she gained an influence over their minds, which she was thus enabled to turn to good. While she exposed the error, she made excuses for the commission; but strongly impressed the sin of indulgence, and the importance of repentance and correction. With young people, she would assert, that error was less great than in those of more ad-

vanced age. The latter sins with full consciousness; while the former often sees little but present gratification, without realizing the cause, or the consequences, the nature of which they scarcely understand. Parents and guardians are often much more to blame than the child. From the latter, we cannot with justice expect knowledge or experience; and it is the duty of those who are set over them so to guard them, that they may not be exposed to dangers beyond their strengh. With years, discretion and experience grow; but, till then, it can only be a borrowed light, which should be willingly lent to point out danger.

Now that Algernon saw the faded form of his mother hourly before him, now that he realized her patient and continued suffering, he felt bitterly his former want of sympathy. He remembered with pain how little he had appreciated her in his childhood and early manhood, and many were the bitter pangs of self-reproach which assailed him. When death has removed a beloved object, when we no longer hear the voice of love, when little passing vexations are forgotten, and great kindnesses rise to the surface, then we remember with agony every cold look, the sharp retort, the unkind construction put on well-meant advice, or judicious denials. No feeling is so

distressing or harrowing as that which a wounded conscience gives, when it is too late to ask forgiveness or make reparation. The arrow has pierced the inmost recesses of the soul, and no earthly hand can force it out. It is a death-wound. One which is too often repaid in kind. The ungrateful child will have an ungrateful son or daughter.

Thus it was with the son, who, on a cold, dark, wintry night, returned for answer to the piteous appeal of his shivering parent, as he drove him from the door, "Father, I saw you do the same to your father; so what right have you to complain, when I am only following your example?" "He that seeth in secret, rewards openly."

In Mr. Delville's kind and Christian conversation, in the tenderness of his sympathy, in his reverential administration of the Holy Communion, and short but touching prayers, Mrs. Melcombe found constant strengthening and refreshment. She regarded him as God's representative on earth; not as a mere man; and through him, as His Minister, she was permitted to rejoice in private in those ordinances which are His appointed means, and in which her sickness prevented her from participating in public. There was a peculiar kindness in his manner, a self-abnegation, a freedom from

all excitement, a soberness in his views, a soundness in his words, and a gentleness and sweetness in his voice, which proved him to be a faithful witness "to the truth as it is in Jesus," and a true son of his God and His Church. It might be said of him as has been well said of another, that "in listening to his remarks, so spiritual and experimental, and in looking on his countenance, so brightened with the gladness which pervaded the inner part, his religious state might be contrasted with that of the grovelling grub, "which has become a winged insect. He had burst the shell and escaped from a chrysalis condition. His soul seemed freed from the dark prison-house of ignorance and unbelief, soaring upon the newly expanded wings of faith and hope, and basking in the beams of righteousness." To the sick-bed he brought life; in his home he was a perpetual sunshine, but so delicately shaded that no heat or glare distressed or dazzled. In her husband Mrs. Delville enjoyed "that true friendship, which is a divine aid, and spiritual relation of mind, a union of souls, a marriage of hearts, and a harmony of designs and affections, which, being founded on a known agreeableness, and entered into by mutual and hearty consent, grows up into the purest kindness and most endearing love, maintaining itself by the openest freedom, the

warmest sympathy, and the closest secrecy." He seldom directed Mrs. Melcombe's thoughts to the moment of death. He well knew that when "in the valley of the shadow of death"

"The cross would uphold her, the Saviour be nigh;"

and that the cheering prospect beyond the grave was ever present with her. On one occasion she asked what her medical attendant thought of her state. Mr. Delville answered at once, that though it was impossible to limit God's power, humanly speaking, her recovery was hopeless. For a moment she seemed overcome; and, requesting to be left alone for a short time, she closed her eyes, and lay for more than an hour apparently dosing. On the return of those around her she was in a most calm and peaceful state of mind. She looked on Algernon and Edith with a sweet smile and said, "I have had such a pleasant dream. It seemed to me that I saw my Saviour standing at the gate of heaven. The door is open, and there is room for me to pass[1]."

From that moment no cloud obscured her horizon. There was no excitement, no dying injunctions or exhortations, no undue requests for a future with which she had nothing to do. Her work ceased with her parting breath. She

[1] A fact.

had not left any thing of importance to the hour of her death, when the mind, enfeebled by suffering on the threshold of eternity, is no guide for those who are still engaged in the necessary occupations of this life. She responded to the feeling of a dying Christian, who, when one expressed a conviction that anxiety as to this life must appear frivolous to his passing spirit, answered, "No; far from it; you are on one side of the veil, I on the other. Your duties are still in the world; mine have ceased." All that was under her control Mrs. Melcombe had settled in the days of comparative vigour. Her life needed no last words to prove where her treasure had been. Her present peace was a witness to her hope not being made ashamed. Her death would close all her right over the actions of the living, though the influence might long remain. In a few more days, surrounded by sorrowing friends and her weeping children,

"Like Stephen the glory of Jesus surveying,
She breathed out her spirit with, 'Lord! I am here.'"

It was a sad and solemn scene. Mr. Delville knelt by the side of the cold remains so lately tenanted by a loving and lovely spirit. All joined with him as he commended her soul to God, and prayed for grace to follow Christ as she had done.

"They wept, but they were not the tear-drops of woe;
The prayer of the soul that in fervour ascended
Was! 'Lord, when thou callest, like her, may I go!'"

The departure of this dearly loved friend cast a sad gloom over the cheerful village of Staunton. Though she might not abound in riches, Mrs. Melcombe had abounded in love, and none had ever gone from her without feeling that their sorrow and their joys had been understood and met with sympathy. For some time Algernon was quite distracted, and refused to be comforted. He regarded himself as his mother's murderer, and was with difficulty restrained from some act of violence. Mr. Delville never left him till, by his judicious and tender admonition, he had calmed the storm. While he never attempted to lessen the sense of past neglect, he gradually led him to cast his sorrow upon the Man of Sorrows, leaving a remembrance that would be a guide for the future, but extracting the sting of remorse. Edith found an equally kind friend in Mrs. Delville, and Louisa was her constant companion. Though less violent than her husband, she had many and painful subjects of reproach; but her heart had long been under the influence of Divine grace, and she had repented and been forgiven, and could turn like a child to her Father in heaven. The chamber of death is sacred, and we leave it to its solemn silence to

turn to one whose worldliness of feeling even death itself could not diminish.

On the receipt of the letter containing the announcement of her sister-in-law's death, Lady Melcombe, by no means softened, was rather indignant at the idea, and was quite convinced that she had been petted and indulged so much in all her foolish fancies that it had killed her. A few days after Mrs. Delville received the following letter:—

"My dear Madam,

"Sir Henry and I are extremely grieved to hear of our dear sister's death. It took us quite by surprise, as she seemed so remarkably well when I last saw her, so surrounded with comforts, and such an object of love. I fear that you have killed her with kindness, or that her case has been quite mistaken: country doctors never know any thing. It was much to be regretted that Mrs. Melcombe did not come to London, where she could have had the best advice. I am quite sure that if her nerves had been roused by Mesmerism, her system renewed by homœopathy, and occasionally a little hydropathy, that she would not have died. I know five similar cases which were cured by proper attention. It is, however, no use to think of it all now. She is dead, poor thing; and the only thing for con-

sideration is, that she should be interred with all the respect due to a Melcombe. In consideration of the relationship and Mr. Algernon Melcombe's present position, Sir Henry requests me to say that her body shall be received with pleasure into the family vault; and that, as expense is no object to her son, the funeral should be proportionally grand. Sir Henry will be happy to join the mourners. We shall be obliged to you for a speedy answer, as we wish to return to our usual habits as soon as possible. I am quite sure that if my proposal to come and nurse my poor sister had been granted she would not have died. Why she is dead I cannot think, for there seemed nothing the matter with her but hysteria and hypochondriacism when I was with her.

"With my compliments to Mr. and Miss Delville, and proper condolences to our nephew and niece,

"I remain, dear Madam,

"Your obliged,

"Augusta Clementina Amelia Melcombe."

It was with difficulty that Mr. Delville could restrain his feelings on the perusal of this characteristic letter, and Louisa's warm affections and delicate mind were quite unmanageable on the occasion.. She exclaimed, as the letter was finished, "So unfeeling, mamma, when,

as you know, Lady Melcombe's last visit almost killed her poor sister! Her incessant talking, her total blindness to her weakness, her egotism and selfishness, worried her to death, and she was weeks recovering it."

"I know it, my dear child," said Mrs. Delville. "From having enjoyed the most robust health all her life, Lady Melcombe has no compassion for the weak. From having known no sorrow, sympathy is not in her nature. Having denied herself nothing from the hour of her birth, real self-denial is beyond her comprehension. Whatever deranges her own ease is consequently disagreeable; and thus she would rather blind her eyes to the suffering or distress of others, than be obliged to give up her own amusement. She is the real object of pity; for, as has been truly said by the wise man, 'There is not a more wicked thing than a covetous man; for such an one setteth his own soul to sale; because while he liveth he casteth away his bowels.' God is more merciful, and never allows their intended victims to suffer. 'Man cannot deprive us of our portion, fire cannot consume it, nor rust corrupt it. We need be little affected by any thing that occurs below. If the streams are dried, the fountain remains; if creatures fail or deceive us, our God is the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; He maintains our lot, and He, my dear Louisa, is

our strength and our portion for ever. We should pity and pray for Mrs. Melcombe, rather than condemn her."

"Oh, mamma," said Henry, "you are always pitying every body. I really believe that if a man stuck a knife into you, you would be more sorry for him than for yourself[1]. I am quite sure that all Lady Melcombe is sorry for is that she should be obliged to wear mourning, which will be very unbecoming to her yellow skin; and that she does not like being obliged to shut up her house just as the spring is beginning."

"Fie! for shame! Henry: this is very uncharitable. The dear friend whom we have lost would have been the last to like to hear the little boy she so dearly loved say such unkind things."

"But, mamma," said Louisa, "though Lady Melcombe was always finding fault with every thing Mrs. Melcombe did, she never thought of helping her in any way. If she wished her to see a new doctor, why did she not invite her to her house in London? I am sure it is large enough. And then, when she has never been commonly civil to her in life, it is ridiculous in her to offer the family vault when she is dead. And yet I never heard Mrs. Melcombe speak otherwise than kindly of her."

And Louisa burst into tears, overcome by

[1] This remark was really made.

the recollection that so dear a friend was lost to her for ever in this life.

Mrs. Delville, in answer, added: "No, dear Louisa; Mrs. Melcombe was a true Christian. She regarded all her trials as 'God's messengers sent down to her.' It may be, and is, far more difficult to bear those which seem more directly through human agency; we must equally remember that not a hair of our head is touched without His permission. He sometimes allows His chosen servants to be more especially afflicted, that they may be witnesses to His glory by their patient and cheerful submission and continuance in well-doing; for you have often heard your dear father repeat those words of the Apostle, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' His punishments are oftener in love than in anger. Were it not for suffering, many would never reach the kingdom of heaven. Lady Melcombe is a representative of a large class to whom any relation who has claims upon them is odious. They will do nothing themselves, and are extremely angry with those who prevent their sinking into the obscurity to which *they* would willingly consign them. It seems a reflection on their neglect. If they are not as miserable as they expected, they become envious; and although they would leave them to starve, nothing makes them more angry than

that they should endeavour to raise themselves from beggary by some honest employment. When I first married, my dear children, your father had a church in a populous town, where a variety of characters were brought before him. None was, I grieve to say, more common than that of Lady Melcombe. Neglectful or patronising, expecting entire subserviency in return for the smallest kindness, and overpoweringly polite and affectionate if any fortunate circumstance changed the position. If death relieved them from the troublesome object, their own respectability was apparently increased by a grand funeral, to which perhaps their own neglect had hastened the departed. They fear man, while God is forgotten. Far different is the Christian spirit. In viewing the faults of others, it should be a lesson to us to guard against the same. No character is really known till interests clash; and many a similar seed of evil in our own heart perishes merely from want of opportunity. You remember the verse you learned last Sunday, Henry?"

"O yes, mamma: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.'"

"Well, dear boy, do not forget it; and while I am gone to Heath Farm, I advise you to talk and think more of the example of her who is gone, than of Lady Melcombe's letter. Our beloved friend is beyond the reach of envy or

neglect. You remember, Louisa, Millman's lines?"

"O yes, mamma:—

'The toilsome way she's travell'd o'er,
And borne the heavy load;
But Christ hath taught her languid feet
To reach the blest abode.
She's sleeping now, like Lazarus,
Upon her father's breast,
Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest.'"

When Louisa had repeated these lines Mrs. Delville left the room, and the children returned to their employments, saddened by the remembrance of the many happy hours they had passed with Mrs. Melcombe, which could never return.

It was not to be supposed that Lady Melcombe's offer of a resting-place in the family vault would be accepted; still less that the remains of the humble-minded widow of Captain Melcombe would be carried to the grave with the pomp and parade of a Marchioness of Davenport. Although quite suitable to one, it was equally unsuitable to the other. It had been her particular request, long before her death, that she should repose among those kind friends whose love had cheered her days of sickness and sorrow; and that her coffin should be borne to the grave by the husbands and sons of those to whom in life she had been a friend and benefactor. She

had selected a spot on which the setting sun would shed its last declining ray, that all who visited her grave might, in seeing its departing glory, realize the vanity of even the brightest and most beautiful in this world. Even the sun must set; and thus teaches us to turn from mortality to the rising sun, that we may be taught to feel that while all perishes here below, there is a resurrection to eternal life;

> "There is a world above,
> Where parting is unknown;
> A long eternity of love
> Form'd for the good alone:
> And faith beholds the dying here
> Transplanted to that glorious sphere."

It was a day of gloom and sadness to all at Staunton when the deep toll of the bell announced that Maria Melcombe had entered into rest. She had been a second Dorcas in the village. Under the conviction that she had no call to sacrifice any part of her income to appearance beyond that of a quiet gentlewoman, surrounded by no jealous neighbours' eyes watching to find fault, Mrs. Melcombe had devoted the greater part of her fortune to the good of the poor. To beggars she gave no money; but each received a piece of bread accompanied by some simple tract, which, thus cast upon the waters, might some day return in blessings on their heads. Her only work was for the poor, or

some occasional token of love in fancy work for a friend. Unable herself to visit, or to inquire into cases of distress, she was generally guided in her charities by Mr. Delville, and thus secured from the impositions to which those solely influenced by feeling are always exposed. On the 1st of June it had been her annual custom to assemble the village children and elderly people to tea on her lawn. The evening closed with a hymn, which the children, who had been really instructed, made a hymn of praise, instead of the discordant yell which distracts and excites rather than soothes and elevates the heart. Mrs. Melcombe watched the joyous faces of the little ones over their cake, fruit, and bowls of milk, while the aged sat pleased and satisfied over the fumes of good tea and toast. She presented each, as they separated, with some useful article of wearing apparel; and when the last melodious strain died upon her ear, she would close her casement window and praise God for having permitted her to be the humble instrument of His mercy. No thought of self-gratulation passed her mind, no feeling of pride in having been regarded as the queen of the day. No; she looked upon all as done unto Him "who loved us and gave Himself for us."

With the exception of the party from Staunton Park, the inhabitants of the rectory, and

Mr. Herbert, none were present at the funeral. Sir Henry Melcombe was too thankful for an attack of the gout, which prevented his submitting to the disagreeable necessity of witnessing so sad a ceremony, added to the fear of cold; while Lady Melcombe, finding that her patronage would not be valued, and in her heart despising the grovelling minds that could not appreciate her worldly attributes, was content to close her blinds for the day, and to deplore, with affected grief, to her favoured friends the loss of her beloved sister—a name which, during her life, she had seemed to forget altogether.

The annual day of the rural village fête was the day fixed upon for the last affecting ceremony. The school children, all clothed in decent mourning by Mrs. Somerset, preceded the coffin, singing those beautiful words set to music by Handel, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," which Mrs. Melcombe had taught them. A few members of her own scattered family were present. Mr. Delville read the service impressively, the sorrow of his heart giving a touching expression to the words as they fell from his lips. As the harmony of voices ceased, he took up the strain in a subdued and clear voice. There were no hired mourners, no drunken attendants, but there was a stream

of tears. While the Dowager Marchioness of Davenport, unloving and consequently unloved, had been trotted with jests and laughter to the family vault, the meek and lowly Mrs. Melcombe was borne with silent and chastened grief to her humble resting-place. When the earth closed over her she was not forgotten; she lived in the memory of all who had known and loved her; and though "remembrance might wake a tear," it cast a soothing and beneficial influence over the mind. Those who forget are not the real mourners. With those who really loved, no thought is so welcome, no influence so powerful, as the voice of the dead, where it has been the voice of truth and love. In the village of Staunton all hearts were bleeding. It seemed to be one house of mourning. Although no escutcheon proclaimed Heath Cottage tenantless, there was a secret voice in each breast whispering, "Thou hast lost a friend." A simple cross marked the spot, a railing guarded it; and a modest tablet in the church told that Maria Melcombe had departed this life on the 22nd of May, 18—, aged 50; a simple text told that

"Them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."
1 Thess. iv. 14.

The epitaph was graven on the hearts of all who knew her. To the world at large Maria

Melcombe had been as nothing. The day was wholly consecrated by all in the village, and towards evening Mr. Delville gathered his flock around him, and addressed them affectionately from his pulpit, not in fulsome praise of a weak creature, but in words of praise and thankfulness to Him who had thus glorified Himself in her, showing how, "through all the chances and changes of this mortal life, His grace is sufficient."

To Algernon and Edith it had been a day of intense sorrow; and while it drew them nearer to each other, they earnestly prayed that their children might never cause them the grief which they had given to their widowed mother. Algernon could find no excuse in his heart; and though years had been devoted to adding to his mother's comfort, and no word of reproach had ever passed her lips or lingered in her heart, he felt that on the day he had deserted her, "the iron had entered into her soul."

Mrs. Somerset willingly consented to his becoming the purchaser of Heath Farm; and the faithful Jane was established in it, with strict injunctions to keep all as it had been, that whenever Algernon and Edith could escape from the turmoil of business, they might feel that their mother's spirit still breathed peace around them. The children, who had tenderly loved their

grandmother, were encouraged to talk of her. Her wishes and example were held up to them, and it might truly be said of her—

"Absent in body, she was present in spirit."

CHAPTER XVI.

In accordance with Mrs. Somerset's wishes, the Duke of Ormanton had passed two springs in London. But although courted by mothers, who by thus condescending lower the dignity of the female character; although smiled on by well-trained daughters, who, if even resenting the instructions they have received, dare not resist them; although fêted by all parties—his heart had remained untouched, and Lady Matilda Mertoun had retained the influence which had arisen from superiority of character, simplicity of mind, and delicacy of feeling. She had practised no arts, for she knew none; she had affected no admiration, and used no flattery; she had been simple and unaffected, and needed no other attraction to secure the affection of such a heart and head as Ernest's. He might have often met with more dazzling beauty; but there was something in the gentle and unpretending appearance of Matilda which witnessed to the purity of her heart. Her devoted and

unwearied attention to her mother, whose peevishness and exactions daily increased; her affection towards her father, in whose dull and dry pursuits she could scarcely be supposed to take any real interest; her kindness and affection towards her brother and his wife; her forbearance and patience with her haughty and imperious sister, whose temper daily became more disagreeable; and her watchful care for all around her—proved the existence of higher motives of action than mere good nature or the desire to please. The good daughter will make a good wife; and in seeking so important an addition to his happiness, Ernest felt that the Duchess of Ormanton should not merely figure in his establishment as a pretty toy or a dressed doll, but should be a fitting representative of the important duties of so influential a station; for when the graces of the soul are wanting, the addition of external things is superfluous and vain. "As when a wall is weak, or a body disordered, whatever you put upon it, it still remains unsound and decayed; so in this case; the soul continues the same, and receives no advantage from things without, not though the man wear a thousand ornaments of gold. We should have ornaments in ourselves, and not be indebted for our glory to the presence of such things; for if we would enjoy things here, we should despise them."

For some years the delicate health of Lord Rockingham and the weak and childish state of Lady Rockingham had almost excluded society from the Abbey. Lady Davenport would have gladly received her sister, as another attraction to her house in London, where every new face for a time excites some degree of interest. She would have regarded her as another piece of furniture, or as a performer in a drama. If the *début* answered her expectations her vanity would be gratified; if not, she would have still retained her as a contrast to herself, which would increase the homage to her beauty. But she was not destined to be gratified in either of these amiable sentiments; for though Matilda would have neither been excited by the one, or depressed by the other, her duty to her parents decided her to decline even the pleasant and affectionate invitation of Mrs. Somerset, in whose house she would have found all that taste, refinement, or affection could secure. Although conscious that her mother's affection was purely selfish she would not desert her. Lady Rockingham loved herself in her daughter, because she conduced to the happiness or pleasure of that self. Another would have done just as well if the change of person deranged nothing in the daily routine. If Matilda took a ride or a walk, she received the strictest injunctions to make it short. Somebody might

call, and there would be nobody to entertain them; or she might wish to go out herself, and need her to walk by her garden-chair, or drive with her in the state-carriage: till at last Matilda had no hour which she could call her own. It was at times sadly irksome, and she would occasionally retire to her own quiet little boudoir, and hope for the day when she might occasionally be permitted to occupy it in peace. She would however at once reject the thought, and, with an earnest prayer for more cheerful acquiescence in her poor mother's trying habits and requirements, she would return to her side with the calm which arises from a soul at peace with God. To those around her it was soon evident that constant confinement, the absence of all youthful association, and the continued strain upon her thoughts and feelings, were by degrees affecting her health; and when Lord and Lady Cornbury returned from their bridal tour, they were grieved to see how languid and colourless she was. They persuaded Lady Rockingham with great difficulty to consent to her going for a short time to Staunton Park. Geraldine promised to take her place, and began so effectually that as her comfort was in no degree affected, her mother-in-law was easily reconciled to the change of attendants. Lady Cornbury had more firmness and determination in

her character than Matilda, so that while she neglected no real mark of attention, she managed the fanciful old lady more judiciously. Instead of giving way to all her nervous fancies, she laughed her out of them; would tell her that her maid was a stronger walking-stick than herself; and that she should have more to tell her when she returned from her ride or drive. She never failed to go to her boudoir immediately after she entered the house, and by her lively manner and ready wit, would manage to draw the poor invalid out of herself and make her smile. She would invite their kind and friendly doctor to stay and play the nightly game at cards, an amusement to which she clung with pertinacity, and to which, in her peculiar case, no other could be found as a substitute. Our habits and occupations should be carefully watched in youth; for when advanced years have confirmed them, we have no longer the same control over them. The mind, like the body, ceases to be pliable. Such as we *have* been, we shall be; and the aged cannot be considered responsible for the *present*, however the past may be written against them. Due allowance is seldom made for the aged, and they are often blamed for a continued frivolity which has become second nature, and of which they are quite unconscious. How much should this conviction tend to impress upon us the im-

portance of our early years. "The future is but the presents cast;" and it has been written of the sinner that in his advancing years "his bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust[1]." It is an awful thought, and one which should lead those still in the full and free exercise of their mental faculties to use them with discretion and understanding, that in the decline of life the early sowing of good seed may be reaped in the autumn harvest; for as we sow, so shall we reap. Dr. Davey strongly advised Lady Cornbury to engage a companion for Lady Rockingham, so as to relieve her daughter from an attendance which another could perform as well. This was accomplished during Matilda's absence. Geraldine was most anxious that it should be settled before her return, being satisfied in her own mind that the result of her sister-in-law's freedom would be her engagement to her brother, and she spared no pains in her research for so desirable an object. It was not a matter of easy accomplishment; for the inferior light in which a lady filling so important a situation is regarded in this money-loving country, renders it so painful to a mind of delicacy or refinement, that few will undertake the office. Were it otherwise, and were not gold

[1] Job xx. 11.

and silver considered of far more weight with the generality than the noblest acquirements and qualities of the mind, a superior class of persons would gladly add to their limited means by so respectable a situation. The association would then become on both sides one of pleasure, instead of the burden it now is. The constant contact with a vulgar and illiterate mind to one accustomed to those of a higher order is most distressing. If there is a Christian feeling on the part of the superior, it is a continued effort to appear interested in trifles, to restrain petulance and disgust, and to make allowance for circumstances, which, though thus rendered less painful to the object of our discomfort, are not less disagreeable to ourselves. It must necessarily produce irritation of mind, and thus creates a greater sense of suffering than really exists. In the mean while the unfortunate victim of the weak mind, which has not power to conform to circumstances and live *alone*, feels constantly depressed, is on the offensive to keep off the defensive, becomes subservient and subdued to her employer; for she can regard herself merely as a convenience, and recompenses herself by an unlimited condemnation of her in her own society, ridicule at her infirmities, and is retained solely by the hope of a legacy after her death. We are thus our own executioners; for

a milder dominion, a more unrestrained and affectionate intercourse, would secure us the society of one who, though not affluent in one sense, may be like a "continual feast" to our minds. Where refinement and Christian courtesy exist, there is no danger of intrusion. If offence were not so frequently given, the humble companion would cease to be on the defensive. A natural feeling would soon point out times and seasons; and instead of being a miserable bondage, there would be an even balance. The money of the superior would provide a home and comforts, while the mind of the inferior in position would confer benefit and support by its superiority and attainments. It is this which makes foreigners so far more pleasing as companions. From not being conscious of degradation, they are at ease themselves, and impart it to those around them. An innate delicacy of feeling prevents their ever being in the way or out of the way, and a grace of expression totally unknown among a similar class in England pleases instead of offending. Thus our children are often placed under the care of foreigners totally devoid of principle, perhaps of a different religion; while if a little more regard to the feelings existed, and the image of gold which blinds our eyes were dethroned, companions and governesses might be friends, and each would be the gainer. In the present case Lady Cornbury was successful, for

her heart was in it. While she felt most anxious that Matilda should be relieved, she had an equal regard to her mother-in-law. She would not have thought it right to benefit one at the expense of the other; and it was with great satisfaction that she heard from Dr. Davey that he had met with a young lady in all respects likely to suit Lady Rockingham. In early life she had enjoyed the comfort of a happy home, and the luxuries which riches can provide; but a sudden reverse in her father's hitherto fortunate speculations, had obliged her to seek a situation which would enable her to assist her parents. In manner and appearance she was pleasing and ladylike. She had many accomplishments, which, added to a cultivated and intelligent mind and good principles, at once prepossessed in her favour. Dr. Davey introduced her as a young friend of his own; and Lady Rockingham, whose opinion rested much upon externals, was immediately disposed to receive her with politeness, if not cordiality. In a very little time she had quite forgotten Matilda; and Miss Norton made herself so useful and agreeable, that, unwilling to part with her, she requested her to remain as a visitor, and thus by degrees her final establishment was arranged. Had Lady Rockingham guessed at the real position she occupied in the family, she would have treated her with the *hauteur* and conde-

scension which is the distinctive mark of a vulgar mind towards inferiors or servants,—a conduct which is never met with among the really well-born and well-bred. That Miss Norton was a dependent was studiously kept from her; and the servants were so thankful to be freed from the constant demands and irritations of their mistress, that they were content to give her the respect which was her due, but which in general they carefully withhold from those who, because they are paid, they consider in no degree better than themselves, forgetful of the fact that education makes far more difference than money.

When Matilda returned, she would have deeply felt her mother's total indifference, but that she was conscious of her mind being weakened. She had ceased to care for what was no longer necessary, and she had still enough of her former vanity and ambition to be extremely pleased at the idea of being mother to a duchess, Matilda's engagement to the Duke of Ormanton being now announced to the world generally. Matilda's visit to Staunton had been of the greatest use to her, and she returned with refreshed spirits and invigorated health. Notwithstanding the gloom which Mrs. Melcombe's death had for a time cast upon that happy circle, there was a quiet, cheerful atmosphere in it, which insensibly

affected all who came under its influence. It was happiness, not excitement; enjoyment, not mere pleasure; intellect and refinement adorned by higher and purer views; the calm which religion and reason invariably give, "religion, which is in fact rectified reason," and which alone gives certainty to the character. Those who fix their eyes on her, will find a refuge always at hand. However the mind may for a season wander, however the false colouring of the world may obscure her brightness, she is ever like a faithful friend ready to return at the first call.

Mrs. Somerset had received her future daughter-in-law with open arms. No feeling of jealousy interfered to disturb the domestic harmony. Her son's happiness was her first object, and if she had herself chosen his wife, she would have fixed upon Matilda. Ernest would not listen for a moment to her proposal of giving up Staunton Park. He urged the great advantage and comfort it would be to him to know that she was there, as London and Ormanton would generally be his places of abode during the year; and it would be much pleasanter to him and Matilda to be their mother's visitors, during the few weeks they could pass at Staunton. To this Mrs. Somerset consented, as her only wish was to live for others. Excepting as a steward,

she had nothing more to do in this world. Geraldine's marriage had released her from the necessity of mixing in general society; and she felt herself at liberty to enjoy a life of retirement with those she loved, in the peaceful exercise of a round of Christian duties. An elderly childless widow is no longer an object of interest in the full tide of the ocean of life; but in still waters she will find many gather around her to cheer and be cheered: "Love is the shadow of the morning, which decreases as the day advances. Friendship is the shadow of the evening, which strengthens with the setting sun of life." In the happy intercourse which she enjoyed with the Delville family, and Mr. Herbert, she had always society; and her son's marriage was a subject of sincere rejoicing and of thankfulness, that he had not fallen into the hands of some vain and frivolous girl, who, instead of weighing all the great and important responsibilities which she took with the ducal coronet, would have regarded it only as an ornament to gild her life of dissipation and pleasure. The ill-natured remarks made by the envious upon the supposed disappointment of the rectory expectations, occasioned much entertainment to its imaginary victims. The visitors who affected a kind of compassionating manner, were not a little vexed to find no trace of such feelings; and that one and all seemed to regard

the marriage as promising increased enjoyment to the happy party, already one in affection and interest. The familiar intercourse which had existed from her earliest infancy with Ernest, had made him regard Louisa more as a sister than a friend; and neither Mr. and Mrs. Delville or herself, had ever anticipated any other result from their intimacy. To them he was always Ernest Somerset; and while the world courted the Duke of Ormanton, they loved the boy whom they had known as a child, and when he became a man he was unchanged in their estimation.

Lady Davenport, though pleased at the idea of her sister becoming a duchess, could scarcely forgive her taking precedency of herself. Still it was a subject of such extreme rejoicing to her that Louisa would not enjoy that envied privilege, that her congratulations were freely given; and, on receiving the letter which thus allayed her fears, she observed to Lord Davenport, "that she was thankful it was not that impertinent girl Louisa." The idea of a country clergyman's daughter being a duchess was odious to her. For her part, she thought they were only fit for governesses and ladies' maids; or, indeed, the best thing would be to send them to the colonies. She immediately ordered her carriage, and visited all her acquaintance, proclaiming with undisguised ela-

tion the marriage her sister was going to make; and while she revelled in her own increased importance, was quite unconscious of the ridicule to which affectation and assumption exposed her.

Prosperity meets with little sympathy, even when meekly borne. Although the detail of sorrow may weary, it cannot offend. Nobody would wish to be in the sufferer's place; but "happiness is supposed to be sufficient of itself, and to require nothing. It is too triumphant, too exalting too be shared. I 'suffer!' is the watchword of fellowship. It is a bond of union between human creatures;" but "I rejoice!" at once, with common minds, seems to shut the door of sympathy, and ever invites cold looks or repelling words to check it. It seems a pleasure to damp it; and for every kiss of kindness, there will surely be ten hugs of envy. In Lady Davenport, vanity had become second nature; and there might be some excuse for the absence of kindly feeling towards her, as her overbearing and patronising manner had made her an universal object of dislike to all beneath her, and of total indifference to those in her own sphere. "Some passions lead to fatal, all to erroneous conclusions; but it is the peculiar distinction of vanity to be ridiculous." While every body felt a secret pleasure in mortifying Lady Davenport, there was but one

feeling towards Matilda. Her unpretending manners, her gentle but firm character, had secured the affection of those who knew her well, and the esteem of all. Accustomed to act at all times upon principle, and not from the excitement or impulse of the moment, miscalled feeling, she was invariably consistent. The friend or acquaintance acknowledged on one occasion, was not neglected on another. She never affected blindness or oblivion. She was too genuine in her character of a lady, to practise that most vulgar of all fashionable follies, called "cutting." By never forming hasty intimacies, she found no cause to change her associates; and if circumstances occasionally threw her into uncongenial society, she practised a courtesy, which, though it pleased for the time, led to no future intimacy, a passing bow being its only acknowledgment. Thus she avoided hurting the feelings of people, whose only offence was, that God had seen fit to place them in a lower sphere; where, unless impertinent or intrusive, their existence is of the same importance as that of the highest in the land. In despising them, we despise God, and by affectation and pride render ourselves the inferior. The maintenance of position must ever be considered a duty. It is not pride. "Pride is an inordinate desire to appear what we are not." It is not pride to remain where God has

placed us. None felt less respect for Matilda than they would for her sister, had she been less imperious. One was feared and hated—the other loved and esteemed. Nothing could be more at variance than their views and feelings in their marriages. While Lady Davenport had married to wield a golden sceptre, for show, ostentation, and vanity; Matilda was earnestly praying that she might be a faithful wife, and use the influence of position for the glory of God, and the good of her fellow-creatures. None of the externals naturally belonging to her future station were forgotten. They were parts but not the foundation upon which she built the edifice of her happiness. Her heart was not in jewels, clothes, or equipages, though she neither rejected or despised them. She would wear them as she did any other part of her dress, and would often have gladly escaped from the trouble her *trousseau* occasioned. Though the same magnificence attended her wedding, she saw it not. Her heart was occupied with higher thoughts. She felt that she was forsaking a home where all the happy years of childhood had passed; where the ripening thoughts of girlhood, and the maturer feelings of womanhood had received birth; that she was entering upon new and important duties. The solemn service came upon her with a power that she had not

attached to it before, and she earnestly prayed that her vows might be ratified in heaven. She experienced the calm that deep feeling gives, the repose consequent upon subdued happiness, the confidence which rests on faith and prayer. It would have been difficult for the eye to rest on a more really noble-looking couple. It was the nobility of mind—where the spiritual prevails over the animal, shedding a lustre on the earthly coronet. It was its brightest gem, and one which would never decay or fade:—

> For "these new rising from the tomb,
> With lustre brighter far shall shine,
> If goodness in the life did bloom,
> Safe from diseases and decline.
>
> "Let sickness blast, let death devour,
> So Heaven but recompense our pain;
> Perish the grass and fade the flower,
> If firm the word of God remain."

It was with a deep feeling of tenderness and love that her father accompanied his favourite child to the altar. Lady Rockingham childishly admired her pretty dress, but was scarcely conscious of any coming separation. The place had been filled up, and she returned to her knitting, and wondered whether Ormanton was as grand as the Abbey. It was a lovely morning, when the bells rang merrily, announcing the wedding day. Not a cloud obscured the sky, and the inhabitants of the village, one

and all in holiday attire, assembled in groups here and there to welcome it. Matilda had not forgotten to secure to all who from age or infirmity would be prevented from joining in the general festivity, a good dinner, and some more lasting token of her love. The venerable and grey-headed old men stood with their hats off as she passed, and blessed her; while the aged women smiled their acquiescence, and silently lifted up their hearts in prayer. The children clapped their hands with childish glee; and the middle-aged and young stood gazing with respect and love. Ernest felt deeply that one blessing resounding from many hearts rested on his bride, and that he should in its fullest sense have a help meet for him. If his mother felt a pang as she looked at her noble son, and thought of the time when such an one had stood by herself, she allowed none to know it. If Algernon and Edith compared their stolen and unblessed marriage with the present scene, it was in a voice only heard in their own hearts. All were determined that no selfish feeling should intervene to obscure the serenity and quiet happiness of the auspicious day. On returning to the breakfast, Mr. Delville took occasion, when the health of the bride and bridegroom was proposed, to make a suitable address upon the sacredness of the marriage union; and

while every heart responded, there was a deep and solemn silence. As Matilda was led to the carriage by her venerable, beloved, and respected father, the tears were in her eyes, tears of gratitude and praise; but when from a neighbouring shrubbery, a full chorus of youthful voices arose, in that beautiful anthem of Handel's, "When the ear heard him then it blessed him," she was completely overpowered, and falling back in the carriage, burst into tears. Those childish voices she had taught; and it was with mingled feelings of joy and sadness that she passed the little songstresses, and heard the falling cadence of their voices as she drove through the park, and was greeted with a loud and hearty hurrah, from the men and boys, as the gates closed after her.

Who has not felt the weariness that succeeds a morning of excitement? the heaviness that creeps into the heart when the beloved ones are gone, and we feel their vacant places around us, when we are left with the "ghosts of departed blessings?" All, excepting Lady Rockingham and Lady Davenport, were more or less under the influence of a saddened feeling. The passing pageant had absorbed all other considerations in their vacant and frivolous minds. Like children, whose dolls become living objects of interest in their enchanted eyes, the six infantine bridesmaids

became for the moment all engrossing, and they were little disturbed by the departure of the principal actors in the scene. Lady Davenport's little girl—Edith's two lovely children—and the three little Delvilles—had performed their part well; and though Lady Davenport considered it a great condescension on her part to allow such "nobody's" to be her daughter's companions, she comforted herself with the flattering unction, that she could easily cast them off hereafter, and allowed herself to be amused with their innocent gambols on the lawn. Suddenly a loud scream startled her ears; and in running, for she actually so far forgot herself as to run, she saw a snake slowly winding itself around Mary Melcombe's leg. She immediately snatched up her own child, and without giving a thought to the others rushed to the house. The little Melcombes, far from running away, entreated Mary to keep perfectly still, at the same time assuring her that the animal was of an innoxious kind, and that it would soon drop off. The Delvilles ran to a man whom they saw in the distance, and were delighted and thankful to find one of the gamekeepers, who had providentially come to bring food to the partridges, on the lawn. Notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of the little Melcombes, poor Mary had become so faint, that she could no longer stand;

and if the gamekeeper had not caught her in his arms, she would have fallen to the ground. The sudden movement loosened the hold of the venomous beast; for far from being the innoxious animal the children had supposed, it was a viper. The gamekeeper carried the poor frightened child into the house, and was gently laying her on one of the drawing-room sofas, when an imperious voice ordered him not to approach with his dirty feet. Mary immediately jumped out of his arms, but, completely overcome with fright, fell senseless on the floor; and Lady Davenport, merely pointing to some eau de Cologne, desired the man to pour some over her, and carry her to her mother. Edith was just leaving her room for a stroll in the park before dinner, when she met the gamekeeper carrying her pale and apparently lifeless child. She did not scream or faint, but, like all well-regulated minds, rose to meet her trial. The man soon assured her that there was no cause for alarm, and having gently laid the precious burden on the couch, left her to the tender love of a mother, muttering, as he went down stairs, something very like "heartless brute." Edith caught the last word, but fortunately attaching its meaning to the snake, paid no attention to the observation. The other children soon arrived in breathless haste, and in

no little indignation with Lady Davenport, who, regardless of all but herself, had detained them, to reprimand them severely, for having exposed her precious darling to so much danger; adding, contemptuously, that vulgar people's children were always getting into scrapes. The little Mary, soothed and cheered by her gentle mother, soon recovered her spirits; and Edith did not lose the opportunity of impressing upon her that she should remember to thank God in her prayers, for having preserved her from so great a danger. This last adventure had completed the measure of Lady Davenport's ill-humour; and she declared it to be a most stupid wedding, and not worth even the trouble of dressing. She wished to have made up for it in the evening by a dance; but to this nobody seemed inclined, though a large and cheerful party remained in the house and contributed to the enjoyment of the happy tenantry and dependants: all was conducted with decency and propriety, and no drunken revelry disgraced the scene.

Miss Norton had entirely supplanted Matilda in Lady Rockingham's affection, and though she made no improper use of her influence, it was complete. This happy result was a great relief to the rest of the family; and Lord Rockingham, incapable of a mean jea-

lousy of his son, requested him to remain at the Abbey. Together they regarded and provided for the interests of those committed to their care.

The rising and the setting sun could view each other with no feeling but that of love. The one hoping for a continuance of the subdued light of the closing day; and the other contemplating with unalloyed happiness the bright dawn which gave so rich a promise for the future.

Geraldine devoted herself to her father-in-law, and was always ready to take a full share in the unthankful office of amusing the querulous Lady Rockingham. No foolish interference from Mrs. Somerset disturbed their comfort. Her daughter was henceforth to her a friend. In resigning her to her husband, her duty was completed; and though Geraldine might often refer to her mother's superior judgment and experience, it was always given with reference to the wishes of those to whom she was bound by the first and strongest ties. With her son, she was even more delicate; for though Matilda was her child in affection, she felt it more natural that young people should prefer the new ways of the present to the past; and she neither expected or wished them to be the slaves of her will. The unnatural and ridiculous expectation that her son's wife should

in a moment become an inherent part of her husband's family in all its affections and prejudices never entered her mind, and she left to time and circumstances the growth of a seed which, planted in love, would gradually and surely expand. Like the guide in a foreign country, Mrs. Somerset had led her children through the perils of ignorance and inexperience, and now rested on her oars, while the young and vigorous continued on their course. Thus, she was always a welcome guest at Ormanton; and neither Matilda or her household dreaded her interference or mischief-making, so common in "family spies." If things were different from her preconceived ideas, she accommodated herself in silence, and freely resigned the place as mistress, which courtesy had hitherto assigned her, on her visits to her son previous to his marriage. The duke, unwilling to disappoint the expectations of the tenantry, had purposely delayed their arrival at Ormanton, till a few weeks of married life had made them less preoccupied, so as to rejoice with them, instead of only tolerating the happiness around them. Matilda gained all hearts. Unlike her sister, she was cheered by the genuine and heartfelt expressions of joy on their arrival. She gratified all by showing herself freely, and by a kind look or word to all. No vanity influenced her, but the

desire to give pleasure; and nobody left Ormanton humiliated or disappointed. "The good she countenanced, the vicious she endeavoured to correct, and was herself a pattern of all that was virtuous and praiseworthy. To her household she was a benign patroness and faithful friend, and by dealing justly with all, she maintained equality without giving offence. Nothing was enjoined in the kitchen that was not practised in the parlour. There were no two religions, one for the poor and the other for the rich. With her equals, she was always kind and obliging, though difference of opinion might exist; to her inferiors, courteous and considerate. She had taken the duties as well as the pleasures of station, and regarded rank and riches as a sacred trust committed to her to improve for the good of others."

The chapel was now in beautiful order, and the chaplain regarded with the respect due to his office, and which his own character and manner would ensure him. He was neither held up to ridicule for not having a fashionable dress and manner wholly unsuited to his sacred character, nor to contempt for not being in the high station of those who had appointed him. If such is the habit of the heads of the family, the usefulness of a man is wholly destroyed; for it is impossible for the young or ignorant to respect those who are constantly made objects of

ridicule. At Ormanton both master and servant knew their relative positions. "A man that knows himself, knows how to act with discretion and dignity in every station or character. Almost all the ridicule we see in the world arises from self-ignorance. Affectation is the spring of all ridicule, and self-ignorance the true source of affectation. A man that does not know his proper character, nor what becomes it, cannot act suitably to it. He will often affect a character that does not belong to him, and will either act above or beneath himself; which will make him equally contemptible in the eyes of them that know him. A man of superior character, that knows himself, knows that he is but a man; subject to the same sicknesses, frailties, disappointments, pains, passions, and sorrows, as other men; that true honour lies in those things in which it is possible for the meanest peasant to excel him, and therefore he will not be vainly arrogant. He knows that they are only transitory and accidental things that set him above the rest of mankind, that he will soon be upon a level with them, and therefore learns to condescend: and there is a dignity in this condescension; it does not sink, but exalts, his reputation and character.

"A man of inferior rank, that knows himself, knows how to be content, quiet, and thankful in his lower sphere. As he has not an extrava-

gant veneration and esteem for those external things which raise one man's circumstances so much above another's, so he does not look upon himself as the worse or less valuable man purely because he has them not, much less does he envy them that have them. As he has not their advantages, so neither has he their temptations; he is in that state of life which the great Arbiter and Disposer of all things hath allotted to him, and he is satisfied: but as a deference is owing to external superiority, he knows how to pay a proper respect to those that are above him, without the abject and servile cringing which discovers an inordinate esteem for their condition. As he does not over-esteem them for those little accidental advantages in which they excel him, so neither does he overvalue himself for those things in which he excels others.

"Were hearers to know themselves, they would not take upon them to dictate to their preachers, or teach their ministers how to teach them; but if they happen to hear something not quite agreeable to their former sentiment, would betake themselves diligently to the study of their Bibles, to know whether these things were so.

"And were ministers to know themselves, they would know the nature and duty of their office, and the wants and infirmities of their

hearers, better than to domineer over their faith or shoot over their heads, and seek their own popularity rather than their benefit. They would be more solicitous for their edification than their approbation; (the most palatable food is not always the most wholesome;) and, like a faithful physician, would earnestly intend and endeavour their good, though it might be in a way they may not like; and rather risk their own characters with weak and captious men, than withhold any thing that is needful for them, or be unfaithful to God and their own consciences. Patients must not expect to be pleased, nor physicians to be always applauded[1]."

While Mr. Meredith gave proper respect to his patron, he never forgot that his real Master was above all, and that in his preaching he was boldly to maintain the "truth as it is in Jesus." For "the true man does not think what his hearers are feeling, but what he is saying."

> "In witness of the Lord,
> In humble following of his Saviour dear,
> This is the man to wield the unearthly sword,
> Warring unharm'd with sin and fear."

[1] Mason on Self-Knowledge.

CHAPTER XVII.

All had returned to its usual quiet routine at Staunton since Matilda's marriage. Louisa no longer cared to go to London without Geraldine Somerset. The two seasons, passed in a place where none "stand still" long enough to be loved, had convinced her of the unsatisfying nature of what is falsely called society. The knowledge she had gained had taught her to find increased enjoyment in the happiness which arises from the powers and faculties God has given us. Constantly occupied, she had no time to find out that in the midst of every real blessing she was an object of commiseration to be "so much in love with sorrow and peevishness, as to lose all these pleasures, and prefer to sit down upon a little handful of thorns." In the companionship of her parents she ever found a fresh and gushing stream of pure love; in her brothers and sisters, amusement, occupation, and interest. Her brothers were amiable and obliging; no rude, overbearing manners were

tolerated at the rectory. They were taught to regard their sisters as objects of care and respect. No vulgar expressions or coarse songs, such as schoolboys are apt to bring home, were ever heard. The daily conduct was for God. They were gentlemen because they were gentlemen, and not only for company. By becoming their friend, Louisa was the confidant of all their little joys and sorrows, of their juvenile delinquencies; and her feminine mind and strong Christian principles had the most salutary effect on them. By sharing in their innocent amusements, contriving pleasures for them, they had no temptation to seek the pleasures of sin. At school they had been taught to consider their master as their friend, not as a hard taskmaster, towards whom every disrespect was a subject of praise, and every act of deception a proof of cleverness. To the servants they were kind and considerate without familiarity, giving no unnecessary trouble, and looking upon them as humble friends. No lady trembled for her china, or her lapdog, or favourite cat, when the Master Delvilles called; no servants groaned at their approach. Their visits were properly timed, and not frequent. Few people find much to say to children; and after a short time the effort becomes irksome. Those who are unaccustomed to them scarcely know what to say, and long and constant visits seldom please. The young

Delvilles had been taught to consider the feelings of others; so that they never bounced into the room, banged the doors, ran about the house, opening cupboards and asking for sweet things, as vulgar, selfish children are apt to do. Though perfectly self-possessed and at ease, their manners were quiet and unobtrusive, ready to answer when addressed, or content to be silent at other times. They were never to be seen whispering and giggling, making every body uncomfortable by the supposition that they were the object of their mirth. They were consequently always welcome; and though the envious would watch them with the eyes of a basilisk, though Mr. and Mrs. Delville were exposed to much ill-natured remark, their children were such a witness to the excellence of their system, that it was impossible to deny the goodness of the fruit, however its training might be condemned. It is a remark of Burke, that "perfection is not in general the object of love, and that this is the reason why the necessity is in every body's mouth. Those virtues which cause admiration, and are of the sublimer kind, produce terror rather than love; such as fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like. Those which excite love are the softer virtues, easiness of temper, compassion, kindness, and liberality; though the latter are of less importance and momentous concern to society, and of less

dignity. It is for this reason that they are so amiable. The great virtues turn principally on dangers, punishments, and troubles, and are exercised rather in preventing the worst mischiefs, than in dispensing favours; and are therefore less lovely, though highly venerable. The subordinate turn on reliefs, gratifications, and indulgences; and are therefore more lovely, though inferior in dignity. Those persons who creep into the hearts of most people, who are chosen as the companions of their softer hours, and their reliefs from care and anxiety, are never persons of shining qualities or strong virtues."

This it is which prevents so many from attempting to rise. They are no longer understood. They are alone with their higher aspirations. Some call them mad; others accuse them of hypocrisy; for

> "In parts superior what advantage lies?
> Tell me thou canst, what is it to be wise?
> 'Tis but to know how little can be known,
> To see all other's faults and feel our own:
> Condemn'd in business or in arts to drudge,
> Without a second, or without a judge,
> Truth would you teach, or save a sinking land?
> All fear, none aid you, and few understand:
> Painful pre-eminence; yourself to view,
> Above life's weakness, and its comforts too[1]."

[1] Pope.

Such a weak and frivolous mind as Lady Sophia Cumberland's, so vain and worldly a mind as Lady Davenport's, so vulgar a mind as Lady Melcombe's, so childish and selfish a person as Lady Rockingham, could no more appreciate the motives of Mr. Delville and Mrs. Somerset than the pig could care about the silver trough. If Lady Sophia heard them praised she was silent, looked mysterious, or pitied people for being taken in; but if any body gratified her by an unkind remark, or some ridiculous representation, or perhaps fabrication of some youthful indiscretion in their children, she would be sure to repeat it, in the hope that it might reach the rectory, sometimes under the pretence of wishing to contradict it on authority. The object was always defeated. Mr. and Mrs. Delville never for a moment indulged the supposition that their children were perfect. On the contrary, they were more alive to their faults than strangers could be, as they knew them better, and were desirous of eradicating them. To reports they were indifferent, being fully persuaded of their untruth, and that, as the object of repetition is more a love of detraction than the desire to do good, contradiction would be vain. All that is bad will invariably be welcomed with open arms, while the good can only be driven on by the most

violent impulsion. Even if appearance of good cannot be denied, if reality in externals brings conviction, the motive will be suspected. The praise must be of God, and the reward in His blessing on our children. "Just praise is our due;" but the professed fear of making a person too happy or vain will constantly withhold it. The wise will praise God if their plans succeed, while to flattery they will ever be indifferent. Lady Sophia could never quite forgive the part which the Delvilles and Mrs. Somerset had acted towards Edith. It was a reproach to herself. She would have preferred the *éclat* of raising Algernon and her daughter herself from misery to riches. She would have liked a grand reconciliation which would have brought herself forward in the noble light of a generous and forgiving mother. She was all smiles and courtesy externally, while in her heart she cordially hated all at Staunton. Mrs. Somerset's acknowledged superiority was wormwood to her. Her praises, echoed on all sides, were like daggers, her affection for the Delvilles an offence. To Louisa she more especially bore dislike; and though Mr. Herbert's preaching and teaching tended to the eradication of such unchristian feelings, they were too deeply seated to be easily uprooted. Still whenever her house was full she would gladly have had Louisa as an amusement for her

guests. She played and sang beautifully, was pretty and graceful and full of conversation, and she would have regarded her in the light of an actress. Mr. and Mrs. Delville were far too sensible to indulge Lady Sophia at the expense of their daughter's good. Not in the least flattered, and perfectly aware that it was her own advantage, and not Louisa's, that she sought, they were indifferent to her taking offence if they declined her invitations. Occasionally she visited at Langdale under Mrs. Somerset's protection; but this did not agree with Lady Sophia's wishes. It gave her a support which rendered her being treated in any way slightingly impossible, and she dared make no arrangements inconsistent with the strictest propriety. Had it been otherwise, Mrs. Delville would never have allowed her to go alone; but she felt perfect confidence in her friend, satisfied that her child would be quite as sacred in her eyes as her own had been.

It was at Langdale that Louisa met Mr. St. Clair. He was one of those embodied evil spirits, who, externally endowed with all that nature can give, are wholly devoid of grace: a beautiful outline, which needs filling up, but one of which the surface is so hard that while it tempts all to approach, its slippery nature renders a footing impossible. Vanity was his prevailing passion, and no object too sacred to be

sacrificed to that shrine, one of the most heartless that exists. He had been much abroad, and read all that could give charm to conversation. He read to talk, not to learn; and talked to attract, not to improve. He had cultivated all the accomplishments which dazzle, and considered himself irresistible in one of Mario's favourite songs. He was strikingly handsome. Tall, but not so much so as to lose any of the grace of limb, and delicacy of contour, without which height becomes a moveable and shapeless mass, or a painful attenuation: he was slight and graceful;—his eyes were large, dark, and lustrous, with an expression of affectionate interest which he lavished on his victims; his hair fell in graceful curls on a forehead of alabaster whiteness, the nose was delicate and refined, and his smile one of the most benevolent. Still, to those who studied human nature, and from whom experience had withdrawn the veil which softens, shades, and heightens effect, there was something too affected in the whole to give confidence. To the eye of truth there is a peculiar expression in the countenance of a dishonest man which is detected in a moment, and it has been well said that a double eye can never look another in the face: sincerity shrinks from it, and the deceiver feels that he is discovered. A crafty mind

finds no response in the upright heart. It has been remarked that the fly, although much more troublesome and bold in his attacks, is less hated than the spider: the one is open and free, we know what he is about; but the other is artful and scheming, so that he creeps upon you unawares. It is far pleasanter to deal with those whose openness occasionally leads to mistake or gives offence, than to be with others who, while their "words are smoother than butter, have war in their heart;" or, who are so cautious that their real meaning or opinion is never ascertained. For years Mr. St. Clair had been a practised flirt, making each object of his amusement and vanity believe that she was the sole thought of his head. Heart he had none, so that as soon as he had the satisfaction of feeling that he was beloved, having carefully avoided committing himself in words or writing, that he might not be exposed to what he would have regarded as the impertinent interference of relations, he quietly disappeared. Some dying relation or unexpected call of business was always at hand as an excuse. It was afterwards discovered that he amused himself by ridiculing in rhyme the affection he had blighted, and reading his heartless effusions to those who from similarity of taste had become his companions[1]. Such a

[1] A fact.

man could have no friends. The victims already sacrificed to his vanity had been numerous, and the moment his eye rested upon Louisa he fixed on her as another. Too pure and truthful to see through so artful a character, and finding him in all his opinions far superior to most of her frivolous partners in London, she found her mind gradually dwelling upon him. Mrs. Somerset had not been off her guard. She had watched her tenderly, and immediately spoke to her with a mother's love. Louisa, confident in the real interest of so true a friend, and convinced that no motive but her good could influence her, listened with respect and attention, and, without appearing to do so, she gradually withdrew herself from Mr. St. Clair's society, and avoided him as much as possible. She was not a girl to give her affections unasked; and though her fancy might be pleased, her heart was untouched. She had been too carefully trained to love one whom she could not respect, for character can alone ensure a lasting affection. Mr. St. Clair was surprised and alarmed. He had supposed himself irresistible, and his vanity was deeply wounded. He would affect a sadness peculiarly suited to his cast of countenance, which passed into a bright and animated smile if Louisa's eyes met his; but she was not beguiled, and soon detected him,

when he no longer imagined her in sight, amusing himself with others, and, as she fancied, making herself the object of remark.

On one occasion when he had taken his usual place by her side, at a *déjeûner* in the neighbourhood of London, the crowd had separated her from Mrs. Somerset, and she found herself most unwillingly forced to take his arm. He purposely delayed the discovery, as he had seen her chaperon a few minutes before on a seat only a few yards from them, but concealed by a tree. After having contrived to walk with her through a considerable part of the grounds, studiously avoiding the most frequented paths to give an appearance of particularity, he at last found himself obliged to resign her to the care of Mrs. Somerset. She had not been sitting many minutes, when two persons, one of whom she easily recognised by her voice to be Lady Davenport, approached, talking in no very gentle strains.

"Well," said Lady Davenport, "Louisa Delville is caught at last, and, particular as she pretends to be, is evidently to be added to the gay St. Clair's victims."

"Oh! yes," rejoined her companion, "I have long seen how it would be; but any body can take Mrs. Somerset in by a little flattery and subserviency to her opinions. She has lived so

long out of the world in that imaginary paradise of hers at Staunton, that she knows nothing of it. I cannot help being amused: though if I were to tell her, she would only think that I was jealous, and wanted him for Maria. He would, I have no doubt, have married her when she first came out; but I was much too sharp-witted for him, and Mr. Ashby soon frightened him away."

"I don't pity Louisa at all," said Lady Davenport; "it is such nonsense in those Somersets to make such a fuss about the Delvilles. Really their stupidity is dreadful: the rectory is a little bit of a house, which would almost go into one of my reception rooms; and I never could see that Louisa was in the least different from any other country girls."

"Nor do I," said her friend. "She wants fashion; and then she is so civil to every body, as if she felt obliged to them for tolerating her. It is a great comfort that she did not succeed in her desire to marry your brother. Mrs. Somerset, with all her affection for her, took care to keep her son out of her way."

"Well, we shall see what she does with Mr. St. Clair, for she need not fancy that he means any thing. If he ever does marry, it will not be a pennyless nobody like her."

Louisa, who had heard the whole conversation, was more amused than displeased. Mrs.

Somerset looked at her with an affectionate smile, and could not help, in her own mind, contrasting her simplicity and truth with the heartless and unfeminine minds and manners of her detractors. She knew her too well for a moment to suspect her of the designs attributed to her, and which, having been indulged in by both ladies, were naturally given to Louisa. To her they were incomprehensible, and as such ridiculous.

Soon after this meeting Mrs. Somerset left London, and in the interest of Matilda's marriage, and Mrs. Melcombe's death, Louisa completely forgot the existence of Mr. St. Clair. It was therefore by no means an agreeable surprise when she met him at Langdale Park ; but as she had gone there with the intention of remaining some days, and he had not as yet been sufficiently explicit to justify any open dislike to his attentions, her returning home would have appeared to give him too much importance. Lady Sophia was not the friend to whom she would have explained her reasons. Seconded by Mrs. Somerset, she contrived to defeat all his attempts either to engross her attention, or to draw her into *tête-à-tête*. She took no solitary walks, and entirely prevented his ever finding her without others, so as to make the conversation general. Piqued to the highest degree by an avoidance which he had never met be-

fore, it gave a real interest to what he had hitherto regarded as a pleasant pastime ; and in his anxiety to conquer, he forgot his usual caution, and found himself caught in the snare which he had laid for others. To his great surprise, he was conscious of a pulsation in his side, which he had never known before. Indeed it became so troublesome, that he had serious thoughts of consulting a physician ; till, explaining the symptoms one day to a friend, he suggested that a thing called a heart found itself placed in that particular part of the body, but that as it had never in his case been called into action, he had not till now been aware of the possession. He assured him that the symptom need occasion no alarm, and that in all probability it would soon regain its former torpid state. Mr. St. Clair meditated long and deeply upon this opinion, and finding that the palpitations always increased upon Louisa's approach, he began to suspect that she had some secret influence over them. The possibility of a refusal never crossed his mind ; he had not a doubt of any thing being needed to secure her, beyond an expressed wish ; and was fully satisfied that the honour he imagined himself about to confer, would be appreciated as it deserved. He stood a little in awe of his fashionable friends, whose ridicule, he expected, would be excited at the idea of his being taken in by a country

girl; but to this he reconciled himself, as Louisa's parentage would bear a scrutiny. Of her present conduct he judged by his own, and was persuaded that she was affecting to avoid him that he might come to the point. Perfectly comfortable in this conviction he commenced a different plan of operations, and by lessening his attentions hoped to detect disappointment in her manner. If this were his object it entirely failed; for Louisa appeared as indifferent to his neglect, as she had been annoyed by his pursuit, and was more lively and happy than during the first part of her visit. Mr. St. Clair was astonished. It was the first time that he had been baffled, and he felt half angry and half vexed. Louisa was so thankful when the day arrived for her return, that she almost sprang into the carriage, rejecting his proffered assistance, and leaving a most mortifying recollection of her joyous look on his mind. Finding himself extremely dull after her departure, he roamed about disconsolately for some days, and at last in his wanderings reached the village of Staunton. He was greatly struck with the beauty of its situation, the pretty rectory, and the handsome church. Quite unconscious of its belonging to Mr. Delville he was crossing the fields which led to Heath Farm, the now deserted home of Mr. Melcombe, when he saw a light figure tripping gaily along, accompanied

by two little girls. He immediately recognised Louisa, who was far from being pleased at meeting him; still less so, when he turned and accompanied her towards home. She resolutely retained the hands of her sisters who turned their eyes with no pleasant looks on the stranger who thus interfered with their freedom, and was determined to give him no invitation to enter the rectory. The intentional neglect was unfortunately frustrated; for Mr. Delville, unconscious of any cause against her companion, and knowing him to be a guest at Langdale Park, invited him to luncheon. Mr. St. Clair was astonished, after Lady Davenport's account, to see all so thoroughly in accordance with his own ideas and habits; and his palpitations returned with double vigour. He even began to doubt, as he contemplated Mr. and Mrs. Delville, whether his conduct would be viewed in the favourable light he expected. He had thought to do honour, but even in his vain mind the power of reality had its effect. Mrs. Delville, to whom, in the midst of her grief at Mrs. Melcombe's increased illness, Louisa had quite forgotten to mention Mr. St. Clair, was pleased with his manner, and the visit terminated to the mutual satisfaction of all parties. Till now Louisa had never attached any serious import to his attentions; she had ceased to think of him after Mrs. Somerset's warning, and was not

vain enough to talk of her partners with any peculiar meaning; but she felt it her duty to mention what had passed to her father and mother, who much regretted the cordial reception they had given him.

Day after day Mr. St. Clair contrived to cross her path, till her walks were almost confined to the garden; and though she evidently discouraged all his advances, he could not persuade himself that his handsome self and six thousand a year would be rejected by a country girl. At last he came to the magnanimous resolution of offering her his hand, and the first fruits of his new-found possession. In his letter to Mr. Delville, he betrayed too plainly his selfishness and self-sufficiency. Louisa had become necessary to him, and he would have regarded her in the same light as his horse or his house; a thing for personal gratification, and to be wholly devoted to himself. After he had dispatched his letter, he felt very composed and comfortable, and already, in imagination, saw Louisa gracing the head of his table, and fancied the astonishment of his aristocratical friends, when they saw how well his speculation had turned out. He rather pleased himself with the idea of having done something out of the common way, now that he had ascertained that he need not blush for the family of his future wife. It was, there-

fore, with much surprise and considerable indignation that he received a most decided refusal. The fear of ridicule was the prevailing feeling. On this point, he had no real cause for anxiety; for Mr. and Mrs. Delville were far too honourable to proclaim their daughter's conquests; and Louisa had been too well educated to make the attentions she received a subject of conversation with her young friends. In this case, it soon passed from their minds; for it would have been impossible to feel for the disappointed vanity of such a man as Mr. St. Clair; and Louisa was only too thankful to have regained her lost liberty.

Mr. St. Clair's wound was not mortal. He even began to wonder that he could have given himself so much trouble about nothing; and finding, on his return to London, that the matter was quite unknown, he began, like a spider, to repair his web, in the hope of finding more easy prey; and it is said that he never was again reminded of the disagreeable possession which for a time had disturbed him. There had been one who had not been an uninterested observer of the passing scene, and this was Mr. Herbert. He had long cherished a deep and secret affection for Louisa; but holding his present living as he did, only till Edward Cumberland was of an age to take it,

he had not felt justified in showing his preference. It was not until the fear of losing her had possessed him, that he discovered how completely his heart was devoted to her; but he resolutely avoided all opportunities of meeting her, as he would not have thought it right to ask her to share in his poverty. Although his strong religious principle supported him, his bright and happy look forsook him, and every body wondered at the change. About this time an old aunt of Mr. Delville's died; and, to the great surprise of her nephew, left him nearly the whole of her fortune, amounting to three thousand a year. To Louisa, as her god-daughter, she also left twenty thousand pounds. As the probability of this bequest had never been suspected, it excited considerable sensation. The expectant relations, who had for years been paying assiduous court to the old lady, in the hope that, in the tender and respectful phraseology of the present day, "she would cut up well," were furious. She had disappointed them all, and instead of allowing herself to be dissected, had bequeathed herself whole to Mr. Delville, the only one of her relatives who, beyond the common courtesy due to an aunt, had paid her no particular attention. Lady Sophia, who was a distant branch of the Delville family, was greatly excited, and declared that "now, those

odious Delvilles, who always seemed to prosper, would be more set up than ever."

Like all her other expectations on the subject of this obnoxious family, they were not realized. Mr. Delville's character was formed on too sound a basis to be elevated by prosperity or depressed by adversity. If he rejoiced in his accession of fortune, it was as a means of more extensive usefulness. Before he would take possession, he inquired minutely into the circumstances of all who had hoped to be his aunt's heirs, and finding that, in fact, he would have been her heir-at-law, had she made no will, and that none of her relations were in circumstances which made the loss a matter of distress, he received it with thankfulness, as God's gift, and made its employment a subject of prayer. The idea of resigning the duties of his sacred office because he was rich, never occurred to him. The property was not a landed one; and, consequently, intailed none of the duties of a landlord. He had, therefore, no call elsewhere. His position as a clergyman required no display; so that, while he added to the comforts of his family, released Mrs. Delville and Louisa from the office of governesses, and placed his sons, whom he had hitherto educated himself, at Harrow, he felt at liberty to devote his time and money to benevolent and useful purposes. He enlarged his hospitality, not in the

entertainment of a number of persons wholly indifferent to him, but by the interchange of friendship and conversation, and in the hope of speaking a word in season. In coming to the house of a clergyman, people do not expect to find a mere man of the world. Of this kind, those whose sacred profession has not separated them from more extensive association, and other opportunities of learning its fashions and manners, are in general far more entertaining; but, while a certain knowledge of the world is necessary, they expect to find a man of God; one whose conversation leads to better things, and in whom the spirit of his great Master is visible. Such was Mr. Delville; and none left his table without a consciousness of having breathed in a purer atmosphere, and of having imbibed some portion of the same mind which was in him.

If Mr. Herbert had been unwilling to show his affection when his narrow income prevented his offering Louisa a comfortable home; he felt more than ever that a wall of separation had arisen between them, now that she had so considerable a fortune. Any advances on his part might and would appear mercenary; and he determined to absent himself for a time, in the hope of conquering a preference, which the constant opportunities of meeting daily increased. He had, therefore, requested

Colonel Cumberland to allow him to visit his father, and with a breaking heart, he still felt the comfort of a decision of which his conscience must approve. Although Louisa always found pleasure in his society, she had not regarded him in any other light than that of an agreeable friend. She had not been so much in society without meeting with many opportunities of marrying; and Lady Sophia Cumberland would have been more than ever indignant, had she known that the despised Louisa might have taken precedency of herself. She had been educated with such principles that the mere possession of rank and riches, without more solid qualities, could not have satisfied her heart; and she was too happy at home lightly to resign so much certainty for the chances which must ever attend so important a step as marriage.

It was on a beautiful autumnal evening, when "all bright hues together run in sweet confusion blending," that she was accompanying her father in his walk, one of the greatest of her pleasures, and one which she constantly enjoyed. They had just emerged from a little copse into the high road, and were crossing into an opposite field, when they saw a horseman at a distance, whom they immediately recognised as Mr. Herbert, and as they reached the gate of Heath Farm he

overtook them. At any other time he would have endeavoured to avoid them; but as his departure for Devonshire was fixed for Monday, and it was Saturday, he had purposely ridden over to take leave of Mr. and Mrs. Delville, from whom he had met with so much kindness. A feeling of sadness fell on their spirits as they approached the garden of one whose voice had never failed to greet them with an affectionate welcome, but whose gentle accents would never again be heard in this world. The good old Jane, on hospitable thoughts intent, came out to meet them, offering them a cup of tea. Tears were in her eyes, for to her the loss of her much-loved mistress, was the setting of her earthly sun. She had been the object of her tenderest interest from her infancy; and she could scarcely believe it possible that the child she had welcomed into the world, should be reposing in the dust, while she, whose years had passed the age allotted to man, should still be wandering as a weary pilgrim on the earth. Louisa and her sisters lost no opportunity of showing her every attention; and Algernon over whose early years she had watched, as she had those of his mother, was not unmindful of her; but still, she was a lone woman, and lived in the recollection of the past. Her greatest happiness was when Algernon and Edith occasionally

came down for a few weeks, and left their children to her care when they were obliged to return to London. It was a pretty sight to see the old and young thus associated; and they would sit on each side of her in the little porch, and for hours listen to her tales of olden days. As Mr. Delville and Louisa came out of the house, Mr. Herbert, who had left his horse tied to the gate, drew near. They were delighted to see him; but when he told them that he was on the point of leaving Langdale for some months, Louisa was conscious of a feeling of disappointment; and as they slowly strolled towards the rectory, she felt an increased depression, for which she could scarcely account. She vainly endeavoured to conquer the feeling, for she was most unselfish, and would on no account allow herself to indulge in a sadness which would distress her parents, and one the cause of which she would hardly, with her delicate mind, like even to acknowledge to herself. Alfred seemed much out of spirits, and for some time they walked in silence, each deep in their own thoughts: Mr. Delville was thinking of the friend he had lost in Mrs. Melcombe, and of her happiness, after all the suffering she had undergone; and thus engrossed, was unconscious of the unusual silence of his companions.

The evening had gradually closed in, and

the chilliness which is the accompaniment of sunset at all seasons, but more especially in autumn, had unconsciously increased. A breeze which had sprung up aroused Mr. Delville from his reverie; and observing that Louisa, in her haste to obey his call, had forgotten her shawl, he quickened his step, and on reaching the rectory pressed Alfred Herbert to remain with them, and partake of their evening meal. At first he was disposed to decline; but remembering that it would be many weeks before he should again have it in his power to enjoy such an hour of happiness, he resigned his horse, whose bridle had been loosely hanging on his arm, to the servant, and accompanied Louisa into the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Delville anxious for their return. The clouds had gathered, with every appearance of a storm; and Louisa was not sorry to be welcomed by a cheerful fire, and to see the hissing urn on the table. She soon regained her brightness of spirit; taking her usual place at the tea-table, she performed her office with her accustomed grace, and none could detect that a shadow had passed over her heart. Alfred could have wished it otherwise; but then he remembered that he had never "told his love," and he would have almost regretted its being given unasked. The evening passed in cheerful and improving conversation;

and Louisa had just sung her father's favourite air of "Ondine," when a loud clap of thunder, rapidly succeeded by a vivid flash of lightning, struck terror throughout the house. It was followed by a loud scream, and the rushing of many feet towards the door. Mrs. Delville immediately thought of her children, and flew to the nursery, followed by Louisa; but finding all peaceful, and that they had not even been awakened, she turned towards the servants' apartments, and there heard with dismay that Heath Farm had been struck by lightning; and on turning her eyes towards the window, a lurid light was already visible. The alarum was immediately rung, and Mr. Delville and Mr. Herbert rushed out in the midst of the storm, which was raging furiously. Before they reached the cottage the flames raged fiercely, and poor Jane was seen ringing her hands in despair at an upper window. Loud calls of "Come down! Come down!" fell upon her ear in vain. She seemed quite paralysed; but at last her voice was heard saying, that in her haste to unlock her door she had dropped the key, and that being in the dark, she could not find it. Alfred, without a moment's consideration, rushed into the house, and had barely time to burst open the door, when the flames reached the staircase, and escape appeared impossible. He, however, seized a blanket from the bed, and enveloping

Jane in it, commenced descending, in the hope that they might reach a passage which led to the further end of the house, only the lower part being as yet on fire. He found Jane a heavy burden, as she had fainted; but he resolutely pursued his way, and on reaching the opposite window shouted to the anxious gazers for a ladder. One of the villagers, more bold than the rest, ascended, and seizing Jane, earnestly pressed Alfred to follow him. He descended in safety; but had scarcely reached the bottom, when the ladder, which had been hastily brought, gave way, and, falling with great force on his head, he lay insensible on the ground. In the mean time, Mr. Delville's presence of mind and exertions, seconded by the good will of his neighbours, had succeeded in deadening the fire; and the rain, which now descended in torrents, greatly assisted in extinguishing it. Considerable injury had been done, but the greatest part had been saved. The man who had carried Jane down the ladder had proceeded to the rectory, quite unconscious of the fate of Alfred; and Mr. Delville had been too deeply occupied to miss him. When the party reassembled, and Alfred was missed, every face became pale, and exclamations of distress might be heard on all sides. All rushed back to Heath Farm. The wind, which providentially had been lulled during the raging of the flames, now arose

with great force; the rain came down like a waterspout; the thunder, so emphatically called "the artillery of heaven," still rolled in the distance; and occasional flashes of lightning illuminated the horizon. It was vain to hold lights, and voices could scarcely be heard; but a more vivid flash displayed to the eager eyes of one of the searchers Alfred apparently dead, and bleeding, with the broken ladder on him. To fetch a mattress from the house was the work of a moment; one of the bystanders flew for the surgeon; while another bore him into one of the still remaining apartments. It was with inexpressible thankfulness that Mr. Delville discovered that he still breathed. Being accustomed to bleed, he took out his lancet, and on seeing the blood run freely, "thanked God, and took courage." By this time the surgeon arrived, and discovered a concussion of the brain; assuring them at the same time that Mr. Delville had done all that could be done at the moment. The state of Heath Farm rendered it impossible to leave Alfred there; and Mr. Delville suggested that a litter should be prepared, while a bed should be immediately got ready for the sufferer at the rectory. The rain had ceased, and the pale moon, like a cold friend, seemed to be calmly gazing on the desolation a short hour had produced. Her face had hidden itself in clouds while sorrow prevailed; but now

she came forth, serene in her silvery, icy radiance, to light the mourners home. The sad intelligence had reached the rectory that Alfred was dead; and Louisa, no longer able to conceal her feelings, had buried her head and her griefs on her mother's bosom—that mother whose tender love would be as jealous for her child's honour as for her safety. She accompanied her to her room, soothing her with gentle words of affection, while she imparted strength to her mind. She promised to return the moment she had ascertained the reality, fondly hoping that all might yet be well. In a few minutes Alfred was brought in; and, to the great and inexpressible relief of poor Mrs. Delville, Dr. Davey pronounced favourably of his hopes. Her first impulse was to fly to Louisa, and together they returned thanks to their heavenly Father, and joined in supplications for his restoration to health. After seeing that all was provided for his comfort, she left him to the watchful affection of the old and faithful attendant of her children; and committing him to God's gracious care, she retired to the rest all had so much needed. Mr. Delville was anxious to sit up with him; but Dr. Davey would not hear of it, as he was himself in great exhaustion, and so completely drenched with rain, that fears might be entertained for his health. He promised to remain, and in a few minutes peace was restored to the

dwelling where death and sorrow had in so short a time so nearly approached.

On the following morning the medical report was on the whole favourable. Alfred had recovered his consciousness, but was unable to speak. There was still much cause for anxiety, as fever continued; so that perfect quiet and darkness were enforced in the sick room. Poor Louisa continued in a most anxious state, which excited no remark or surprise, as Alfred had endeared himself so much to all who knew him, that a gloom hung on all alike. Every attention that love could bring was heaped upon the sufferer; and as he again relapsed into unconsciousness, Mr. Delville thought it necessary to send for Mr. Herbert. Before he arrived, a change for the better had taken place, and Dr. Davey gave every reason to hope that his valuable life might yet be granted. The sad intelligence of his accident was received with the deepest grief at the village of Langdale. Day after day Staunton was besieged with tearful inquiries: there could be but one feeling for him who had been a friend in all their distresses, and who had taught them to find the path of true happiness. It was many weeks before Alfred was able to join the family party, and many more before he was sufficiently recovered to leave the rectory. During this interval Mr. Herbert had soon discovered the

state of his son's affections. He had seen enough of Louisa to be satisfied that she would make an excellent wife; and before he took leave of Mr. Delville, he had asked and received his consent to Alfred's opening his heart to her. Circumstances were in their favour; for Edward Cumberland's want of energy and extreme stupidity had rendered his passing through college quite impossible; and his father, much provoked and disappointed, had been obliged to withdraw him. His time was now passed in smoking and drinking; he would sit for hours staring at nothing; and gave every promise of closing his life in helpless imbecility. As his taking holy orders was wholly out of the question, Colonel Cumberland presented Alfred with the living of Langdale, which he had hitherto only held for Edward; while Mr. Herbert generously provided for the future comfort and happiness of his son and Louisa.

Louisa, although she had much enjoyed her peep into the world of fashion, had returned to feel that the cheerful atmosphere of a happy home is far beyond the excitement of a ball-room, and, too thankful to have escaped from Mr. St. Clair, felt no unwillingness to continue in the wholesome exercise of the duties she had practised from her earliest years. To her the companionship of such a mind as Alfred Herbert's was far preferable to the shallow

stream of heartless compliment; though she rejoiced in the advantages afforded her by her visits to London, and was grateful to Mrs. Somerset for having thus enabled her to make many valuable friends; she had found many warm and kind hearts among those whose lot and duties are cast in a more enlarged and gay sphere of action. It had given her more correct views of life, and she hoped it would make her more useful to others from knowing the temptations to which youth and inexperience are exposed. She felt satisfied that, humanly speaking, she had secured her happiness for time and eternity. Hers were not romantic notions of uninterrupted bliss. She knew that

> "Into each life some rain must fall,
> Some days must be dark and dreary;"

but she also knew that the same drops which bring forth weeds in one spot, will bring forth flowers in another; and that the darkest cloud and most dreary scene may be cheered by a borrowed light. Her light would be fed with the dewdrops of heaven; and though, like all earthly pleasures, continuance might be wanting, she had a sheet-anchor which no storm could separate from her hold. "Of the world it may be said that it is one great mirror. As *we* are who look into it, so is it in us. It gives us back

ourselves. It speaks to us the language of our own hearts. Such as we are, so does it speak to us of pleasure, gain, honour, vanity, worldly happiness, or of everlasting rest. Our inmost self is the key to all. Our ruling thought, or passion, or love, is that which hath the mastery over us, and governs us and occupies our soul, is touched by every thing around us. The heart where God dwelleth is by *all* things called anew to God; his blessed presence draws it, by its sweetness; or his seeming absence by the very void, may absorb it yet more, by the very vehemence of longing, into Himself." Thus it was with Louisa. She had been prepared for the world in which for a season she had to play her part. Her character had been strengthened by trial. She no longer formed an imaginary view of a scene from which she might have been unjustly excluded, but had learned its true value; and now that she had put away childish things, she turned towards a life of duty with cheerful hope and earnest desires for its fulfilment in faith and prayer. Nobody thought of great preparations for the marriage; none desired a grand wedding. It was a union of hearts, one for life and death, and regarded by all as a sacred ceremony involving the highest duties. Surrounded by her family and those dear friends who had loved her from her birth, Louisa became the wife of Alfred Herbert, that word so

dear to the noble and generous mind, so precious in the sight of God, and so frequently profaned by man. Staunton Park was thrown open to all on the occasion. It was a day of universal rejoicing, not even tinged by the sorrow of a lengthened separation. Alfred and his bride, after a short period passed in peaceful retirement in a pretty cottage ornée lent them in Devonshire, would return to enliven the neighbourhood in which they had so long been known and loved, and to be the comfort of their parents at Staunton Rectory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We must now return to Ormanton, where Matilda had commenced in earnest the important duties she had undertaken. In describing her character it would be impossible to do it better than in the words of the biographer of another. "We need not draw her picture with a side face to hide the disfigurement of either side: both her hands wrought in the work of God; she did not limp but walked in his ways with both her feet. She had learned St. John's lesson, that he who loves God, must love his brother also. She was exactly righteous, and very charitable; she was exactly just in word and deed; she never forfeited her title to the peerage to be believed upon the honour of her word, which was as sacred as any oath, and as good security as many bonds. No inconvenience to herself would make her recoil or flinch from the obligations she had brought herself under by her own mouth; yea, she had such an abhorrence of a dishonest

recess from express, or but intimated promises, that it would render her esteem of such persons exceeding cheap and mean, who by little arts and shifts will loose and free themselves from their engagements, and disappoint the expectations they had raised in others, to save their charges, accounting their money spared, a very poor and base redemption. She abhorred a lie. She had learned St. Paul's lesson to perfection, to speak evil of none; and where she could not do well, the worst injury she could do was to be silent and say nothing, unless to some friend of whose silence she was sure. Nor would she invidiously withhold the just praises of any who deserved them. And she was as just in deed as in word. She had learned to do as well as say; she not only gave good words, but good performances. In all relations she was equally faithful, and no self-interest would have made her injure another. The noble and splendid way in which she lived, which is in most a sacrifice to their vanity and ostentation, was not an act of pride or ambition, but purely, at least principally, of conscience. She would not contract or abate, because with her position she had taken its duties. He who had given her the estate expected her to keep up the honours of his name and family in a place where it had flourished, and in that kind been famous to so many. She was a most incomparable mother,

which appeared hereafter in the education of her children. As a friend, she was faithful, kind, constant, open, unreserved, and unsuspicious. As a mistress, she was one of the best in the world. She had a double care both of the spiritual and bodily welfare of her servants; whom she as much loved to please as other persons' servants can do to please their masters, it being her peculiar delight to render the lives of all easy and pleasant, and free from discomfort, that they might serve God with diligence; and she never neglected them when they left her[1]."

It may be supposed that as a wife Matilda was not less practical. Her husband might adopt the language of another, and say, "I can say in sober truth, if, with my present experience, it were left to me to choose out of the wide circle in which I have revolved, I should choose, above all others, that faithful friend whom Heaven has cast into my arms. On the tree under which we plighted our troth, and which we have nourished together, came out at the first buds of mutual affection, gradually opening their beautiful petals to the sun, and exhaling their intoxicating perfumes, but yet fragile and uncertain in their results; then the forming fruit of esteem began to swell and

[1] Memoir of Countess of Warwick, by Dr. Walker.

expand, giving strong promise of a harvest; mutual respect appeared as the next stage of growth, becoming strengthened and enlarged under the ever-changing elements of sunshine and storm to which the parent tree was subjected; last of all, the whole seemed changed into mutual and entire confidence, not the least fair and beautiful of all its clusters, and they have all ripened, and the tree is bending with its precious and golden burden in rich maturity. Autumnal gales must break the branches, the leaves must drop, but the fruit will remain; and there have been no unkindly blasts, and no worm at the root; and whatever may be in store for us, let me thank God for a mutual confidence and affection which have made two hearts, beating in different bosoms, one heart; thus fulfilling His word, that 'they *twain* were but *single*[1].'" Society she enjoyed, while to company she was indifferent; but when called upon to take her part, she cast no shade upon it by an affectation of superiority or contempt. She had several children, and, unlike Lady Davenport's, they were permitted to enjoy the freedom of childhood, and their minds were as healthy as their bodies. To her mother-in-law she was always an affectionate and attentive daughter, and as years rolled by

[1] Henry Colman's European Life and Manners.

she took the greatest pleasure in cheering her declining years. She ever welcomed her with pleasure to Ormanton; but as the fatigue of travelling became more irksome, she and the duke were frequent visitors at Staunton, where, surrounded by friends, beloved and honoured, she awaited her summons, "content to live, but not afraid to die." In her close but elegant cap, her silver hair, and plain but handsome black silk, she was the picture of what old age should be. She thus enjoyed the respect due to years, and the privileges of age, instead of affecting the airs and graces of youth, by which both are lost. It was the freshness of heart arising from the constant exercise of love and charity towards all men. Hers had been—

"The love, the dear delight
Of hearts that know no guile,
That all around see all things bright
With their own magic smile;

"The silent joy that sinks so deep,
Of confidence and rest,
Lull'd in a father's arms to sleep,
Clasp'd to a mother's breast.

"Who, but a Christian, through all life
That blessing may prolong?
Who, through the world's sad day of strife,
Still chant his morning song?

"Nor shall dull age, as worldlings say,
The heavenward flame annoy;
The Saviour cannot pass away,
And with Him lives our joy.

"Ever the richest, tenderest glow,
Sets round th' autumnal sun :
But there sight fails ; no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.

"Such is Thy banquet, dearest Lord :
Oh, give us grace to cast
Our lot with Thine, to trust Thy word,
And keep our best till last[1] !"

A visit to grandmamma was a constant pleasure ; and sad indeed would be the day when the goodly tree under which all had so long found shelter should fall to the ground. Each returning birthday was hailed with joy, all hastening to greet the morning of a new year with some token of love. On one side of the veil, while her younger relatives were on the other, she shed no gloom upon their little day of sunshine. She had, it is true, proved all and found it wanting, but that could be no reasonable ground for destroying the bright and innocent dreams of such well-disciplined minds as those around her. Hope is the essence of our being ; and without it who could pass through this dreary scene ? Even when disappointment has dimmed its brightness, it is still a gleam upon the dark horizon ; and when it is destroyed as regards this world, there is yet a bright and glorious hope of a hereafter, where hope and faith shall be swallowed up in fruition. "Hope should never die :" and thus while her

[1] Keble's Christian Year, Third Sunday after Epiphany.

mind was prepared by watchfulness and prayer for what God might see fit to send, it was not torn and distracted by unbelieving and anxious fears. "They that believe do enter into rest," not from trial, but from the sting that accompanies it in worldly sorrow. Suffering and trial are not a proof of God's anger. Far from it; suffering is sometimes a gift, a great gift. "A suffering gift," says an old writer, "is a greater gift than the gift of miracles. It doth rather prove that the Lord doth honour, love, and prize you, in that He puts you upon a hard work and service. If this be true, a man may be very precious in the eyes of God, and yet meet with unworthy usage in the sight of men[1]."

Far different was the state of Lady Melcombe, to whom we must return, after basking in the still waters in which we have been slowly moving. Elated to the highest degree by the birth of her son, she forgot that he was mortal; and that He who had thus granted her the desire of her heart, could as easily recall that which was but a lent jewel. The christening, instead of being regarded as the consecration of the infant to God, was celebrated with revelry and profane mirth; the religious ceremony, hurried over in a splendid saloon; the consecrated water in a gold bason; and the babe, robed in lace and satin, regarded as the crown-

[1] Bridge on Faith.

ing jewel in his mother's tiara of pride, and not as the heir of an immortal crown. It received the names of Algernon Ernest Augustus, was loaded with costly gifts and embraces, pronounced beautiful before Lady Melcombe, denounced as a poor puny miserable infant when she was no longer present; and all the absurd fuss she made about it ridiculed.

One year had passed over the poor little innocent victim's head, and great preparations were making for the celebration of this, his first birthday. Lady Melcombe had ordered a new dress of bright crimson satin and gold for the occasion, and all the neighbours had been invited to a déjeûner and ball. She was especially anxious that Algernon and Edith should witness her triumph, and feel the difference between their insignificant children, who in her idea were very presuming to have come into the world at all, as they had no fortune, and their father had to make one. She took the greatest pains to make them feel the difference between them and their more fortunate cousins, but somehow, they had the still greater impertinence of being so very happy that all their aunt's manœuvres were lost upon them. In their simple elegant muslin dresses they so far surpassed their cousins in beauty and manner, that Lady Melcombe was forced to allow to herself that fine clothes and gilded

coaches may amuse and please the vulgar, but cannot win love or real admiration. Still she regarded it as a great injustice; and as she walked in affected dignity through her splendid apartments, her self-complacency returned, and she felt that Edith must be mean-spirited indeed to be content in her humble estate. In the middle of her preparations, the sun having arisen with a bright promise for the day, a nursery-maid opened the door, and with a face of dismay, and pale with fear, announced that Master Melcombe was in a fit. Lady Melcombe screamed with horror, and rushing into the nursery beheld the valued representative of her pride, black in the face and with rigid limbs, in a bath; his anxious attendant watching with eager eyes the return of his breath. After a short interval the poor little sufferer breathed freely, and with the tenacity of life peculiar to infancy he rallied; so that before the doctor arrived all present danger was over. Lady Melcombe was rather disposed to complain of the unnecessary alarm; declared that it was all over-feeding; and finding that a sweet sleep was restoring the bloom and freshness to his skin, she gave orders for the continued preparation for the *fête;* and though the little Algernon could not make his appearance, there was nothing to disturb the enjoyment of pleasure-seekers. To such, death, sickness, and sorrow are so many un-

gainly visitors, who, if they venture to carry off one of their gay companions, is quickly driven from their thoughts, and the stream flows on as smoothly as ever. It never occurs to them to think that they may be the next tree marked for felling. It was not, however, the will of God that all should thus return to the even tenor of its way, for the little boy's health visibly declined. Doctors were called in and changed every week; nurses were dismissed. All that money could purchase was obtained, but death had laid his icy chill upon the warm stream of life. It ebbed and flowed, each time becoming more weak and shallow, till the little Algernon laid his head on his downy pillow, and slept in the bosom of his Saviour.

It would be vain to dwell upon the rage into which Lady Melcombe's disappointed ambition converted her sorrow. She had cared little personally for her child, but he was a necessary and important actor in the drama of her life. The man whom in her heart she hated for his acknowledged superiority must now be her husband's heir. The woman whom she had despised would occupy her place, and, she felt, would be loved where she had barely been tolerated. The children whom she had slighted and treated with unkindness would be preferred to hers. The world, for which she had sacrificed all her home happiness, receded from

her as a mad-woman, or laughed at her disappointment. Her husband was at a loss for words of consolation, and took refuge in his club. Her daughters, who were well-disposed and amiable, would have cheerfully devoted themselves to her, but she could not bear to see them, and declared that they were glad that their brother no longer stood in the way of their having larger fortunes. She would sit for hours thus battling with her Maker, or staring in vacancy; and would then sink into restless and disturbed slumbers, and awake to fiercer combat. In utter despair she secretly provided herself with medicated drams, and by constant recourse to them brought on an irritation approaching to insanity. Edith, whose only feeling was one of deep commiseration, vainly endeavoured to soften her heart, and whenever she could approach her was anxious to lead her to the only source of comfort; but judging of her by herself she regarded her kindness as an insult, and forbade the servants to admit her. It was impossible for such a conflict to last long; and after some months, the constant repetition of exciting drugs brought on a violent fever, which terminated her life in a few days; and Lady Melcombe, the victim of pride and ambition, was laid in the same tomb with the son whom God in mercy had preserved from the baleful influence of such a mother.

Neither Algernon or Edith could for a moment indulge in any pleasurable feeling at the prospect of future wealth. Happy in each other, rich enough for all that is needful, respected and beloved, what could they desire more? The only worm in the root was the recollection of her whom they had deceived, whose affection had been blighted and her life shortened by the grief of which, by their reckless conduct, they had been the cause. They would willingly have resigned all claim to the inheritance of their uncle, could it have restored that valued life or lessened the stings of conscience.

Although Sir Henry offered a considerable allowance, and his daughters would gladly have welcomed Edith as a protectress and a friend, Algernon preferred independence and honourable industry to luxurious idleness. Lady Sophia Cumberland was enchanted to think that after all Edith had made a good match, and in her present happiness quite forgot the rugged and ill-shaped steps by which she had mounted. Algernon as heir to a baronetcy and thirty thousand a year, was in her idea quite a different person to the poor widow's son. She even acknowledged that he really was handsome, which she had hitherto denied, and that he had lately become more *distingué* in his manners, a fact which had been re-

cognised by all others long before Algernon had come to Langdale. What she had formerly denounced free and easy, she now regarded as graceful; and his talents, which she had considered as merely equivalent to instruments of labour, she now became proud of. In short, he was to her a picture the excellence of which she had never detected, till it was framed and mounted, while others had long since felt that no such additions could add to its real merit. Algernon, though inclined to smile at such puerile weakness, treated her with the greatest kindness and attention; while he much preferred Heath Farm, which had been restored and improved since the fire, with the pleasures of mind afforded by his near neighbourhood to the rectory and Staunton Park, to the splendour and twaddle of Langdale. As he sat in the cool shade of his pretty shrubbery with his gentle Edith and his sweet children joyfully chasing each other on the lawn, he would contrast the closing scenes in the lives of Lady Melcombe and his mother, and the peace of Mrs. Somerset's latter days. It was true that Mrs. Melcombe's had been a life of severe trial; but though she had been placed in the school of affliction, she had never been forsaken. Faith had supported her, and the promise to the widow and the fatherless had not failed. In her day of sickness after Algernon's deser-

tion she had found friends, her last breath had escaped in the atmosphere of love and kindness, and in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection.

Mrs. Somerset, although in many ways spared Maria Melcombe's trials, had equally witnessed to that spiritual separation from the world which Scripture inculcates. She had made a cloister for her heart; while, as a good soldier, she had not turned her back upon the world, but fought manfully with the enemies of her salvation. She had been in the world, but never of it. She had the happiness of seeing her children useful in their generation. By following our Saviour's injunction to combine the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove, and by constant and earnest prayer for direction, she had fitted them for a world where goodness without knowledge and discretion is as a light in the wind without a lamp. The oil may be pure, and the wick sound and well cut; but the flame is extinguished for want of the judgment which should have protected it. They were neither weak in mind, or enervated in body, by being forced into the neglect of half the gifts of God. All had been used, but not abused. While others tied their hands and bound their feet, she had taught her children to regulate their affections. While most are the victims of feelings which change as the

wind, she had accustomed them to act on fixed principles. Of the spiritual pride which condemns all who do not agree in the same opinions, they knew nothing. Severe judges of themselves, they judged no man. By cultivating their minds, reading the works of superior authors, encouraging all acquirements that could cheer and adorn home, by the study of sound divinity, instead of the morbid sentiment of diseased minds, solid characters had been formed. They had learned to be kindly affectioned to all; and thus, instead of shutting the door of heaven, as Mrs. Watson would desire, against all but the favoured few who bowed down to her opinion, they widened the passage by a pure and holy conversation. To the world of sin they were as strangers or wayfaring men. They maintained no fellowship with unbelievers, no brotherhood with immorality. From such they would instinctively shrink, excepting where good might be done. What the world calls pleasure, was none in their eyes. A higher taste had refined their ideas of enjoyment. If sad, it was not religion that caused the shadow, but the contemplation of sin. While gentleness, kindness, and consideration guided all their actions, the path of integrity and truth was never deserted. They held out the right hand of love to all, and fully proved what the wise man has written,

that "the path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Year after year had passed, and still Lady Davenport continued her wearisome routine of dissipation. Wherever amusement presented itself, in any shape, she was sure to be seen. As soon as the spring in London was over, she kept open house in Scotland for the shooting season, where she was followed by a train of fashionable men, too happy to have a good house and good shooting free of expense. Not one would have cared for her presence, if the table continued to be spread, and the house open to their accommodation; and yet for such a poor return she was content to turn her house into an inn, and to sacrifice all domestic comfort. Disgusted with the unsatisfying life she led, disappointed in the expectation of sympathy or affection from her mother, Lady Mary Granby, her daughter, felt like an insulated being. Too quick-sighted not to see through the selfishness which actuated all around her, fully alive to the absence of all regard or affection towards her parents, and angry at the unconcealed contempt with which her father was treated, she was far from happy. She felt a craving after better nourishment, but knew not where to seek it. Conversation was an art totally unknown at Davenport Castle, or in the coterie to which she was

confined. Unmeaning compliment, detraction, and vanity were the component parts of the *talking* she heard; a higher name it could not deserve. Her brother was a gay, dissipated man, and passed most of his time with opera-singers, whose dress and manners he imitated, as well as their vices. Like Ernest, he had passed through school and college; but while the one had *used* these advantages, he had *abused* them. He considered it quite beneath him to study, and the only use he made of his worldly distinctions was to make himself more conspicuous in his wickedness. His mother was proud of her son, for he was very handsome, and had much natural intelligence, if it had been judiciously guided. Under better direction he might have become a useful member of society; as it was, his quickness made him more extensively mischievous as he gained greater influence. Day was turned into night, money was squandered, and at twenty-one half his expected inheritance was mortgaged to Jews, those pests of society, who are the ruin of half the fortunes in our country. It was seldom that he favoured his parents with a visit; and whenever he did so, it was generally with the hope of extracting money from his mother's foolish affection. Too weak to remonstrate, and too ignorant to regard his career in its true light, she left him to self-destruction, with the consolatory consi-

deration, that he only did as others did; though, as the learned South says, "We need not go to hell because it is the fashion." She flattered herself that it would be time enough to reform as he grew older, and that marriage would make him steady. Many were the mothers who, with all his vices, would gladly have received him as a son-in-law. This was far from being the case with Edith; and Lady Davenport would have been surprised if she had known how resolutely all his advances had been rejected, and that the pretty Ellen Melcombe had positively refused his offered hand. No consideration of worldly advantages would have induced Edith to have sacrificed her precious child, to a heartless, worn-out *roué*. Those who do so under the idea of being able to reform a man hardened in sin, will find that they have made a fearful mistake; and it is a sad but painful truth, that no woman has so little influence as a wife under such circumstances. Her very right to attention often increases estrangement. She must either become "the light unmeaning thing that smiles with all and weeps with none," or her heart will break, unless she has a Christian's hope. Even this must increase her trial, as she must grieve to see her husband in the path of destruction, for as such, God has denounced that which is little regarded in the sight of men. Lord Granby, besides leading a

life of vice, had scarcely the manners of a gentleman; his conversation was a tissue of "slang, the base witling of the stables, the cockpit, and the tavern, the pest of conversation, which takes the name of humour." It has not even the merit of originality; and while the million are endeavouring to improve themselves by education, the higher orders seem anxious to change places with them in all but honest industry. Lord Granby could scarcely believe it possible that he could be rejected by any body whom he honoured with his notice. Like all men accustomed to the society of immoral women, his ideas of the female character were very low, more especially as those of his mother's *coterie*, although their characters might be irreproachable, laid themselves open to contempt by their unconcealed attempts to entrap him. Attracted by the modest simplicity of Ellen Melcombe, more as a novelty than from any due appreciation of its excellence, he had for some time been divided between his love of independence and his attachment. The latter at last conquered, and his self-love was deeply wounded by her rejection of his proposal. At the same time it must be allowed that he loved her as much as so entirely a selfish nature was capable of Instead, however, of endeavouring by reformation to make himself more agreeable to her, he dashed into greater dissipation, redou-

bled his potations, lost enormous sums at the gambling table, and, in riding a race in a state of inebriation, was thrown from his horse, when, falling against a post, his injuries were so severe, that he never spoke again. Here was a death-blow to all his poor mother's high aspirations after worldly grandeur. Even the world could for a short hour stop in its usual giddy course, to pity so young and gay a youth; for, with all his faults, his manners were attractive. "Quand les feuilles tombent dans la saison prescrite, quand les vieillards affaiblis descendent dans le tombeau, la nature obéit en paix à ses antiques lois, à son éternel usage, l'homme n'en est point effrayé; mais, sur cette terre, c'est le malheur imprévu qu'il faut craindre. Le meurtre, d'une main violante, brise les liens les plus sacrés, et la mort vient enlever dans la barque du Styx le jeune homme florissant. Quand les nuages amoncelés couvrent le ciel de deuil, quand le tonnerre retentit dans les abîmes, tous les cœurs sentent la force redoutable de la destinée; mais la foudre enflammée peut partir des hauteurs sans nuages, et le malheur s'approche comme un ennemi rusé au milieu des jours de fête[1]."

Thus it was with Lady Davenport, "exalted on her pedestal of pride," she had imagined herself above the human suffering to which

[1] Schiller, Fiancée de Messine.

mortals of inferior mould are subject. She was stunned, and found, alas! too late, that the friendship of the world is like the leaves which drop from their trees in autumn. "While the sap of maintenance lasts, friends swarm in abundance, but in the winter of need they leave us naked." To her might be applied the poetical but awful words of Isaiah, "Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: in the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow[1]." Hers was indeed a desperate sorrow; she shut herself up in a dark room, covered every thing with black, and refused to be comforted. Her daughter vainly endeavoured to soothe her. She rejected her affection till the violent shock she had received produced its usual consequences, and she was quite delirious. No sooner did Matilda hear of her sister's affliction than she was by her side. Unconscious of all that passed, she lay for many days in a state of stupor. For many weeks her life hung upon a thread. In the pale attenuated being before

[1] Isaiah xvii. 10, 11.

her, Matilda could scarcely realize to herself the form of her once beautiful sister, for beautiful she had been; and, but for the expression which a proud, ill-regulated mind gave to her features, few would have competed with Lady Catherine Mertoun, or with the more developed loveliness of Lady Davenport. By degrees, she recovered to a certain degree the health she had lost, and with it her mind had become more softened. A chastened expression shed a calmer gleam on her returning beauty. In the renewed agony with which consciousness brought the dreadful death of her son before her, she turned towards the sister, whose poor and mean spirit she had hitherto despised. The world appeared altogether changed. She might have joined in the exclamation of the blind man in the Gospel — "I was blind, and now I see;" for the "secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." She wondered how she could have been so long deceived. The veil of deception seemed suddenly torn asunder; light had sprung up out of darkness. The scale had fallen from her eyes; and what had appeared to be flowers, now showed themselves to her as rank weeds and corruption. For a time she was as a shipwrecked mariner who finds himself tossed from his snug berth on a barren rock. She looked for some to have

pity, and found none. The proud woman had been hurled from her pedestal, and, crushed and wounded as she was, all passed by her. It was not thus with Matilda; she who, in the day of her sister's overbearing prosperity, had always borne with her in love, in the day of adversity was her affectionate supporter and guide. Her daughter, who, as is often the case, had seen too much of the misery consequent upon worldly scheming to take interest or pleasure in the plans of her mother, and who had consequently been in great disgrace with her, was now her devoted attendant. In her aunt Lady Mary found a true friend, one who could understand and respond to her feelings, who could give her credit for higher motives, and could believe that she had no craving after worldly vanity. It was long before her mother recovered sufficiently to be moved. By slow degrees the soothing influence of Matilda's gentle spirit, and the reality of death and eternity so awfully forced upon her, had a healing effect upon her wounded spirit. Hitherto she had been under a "delusion to believe a lie;" but it had been suddenly dispelled as by a thunderbolt, and she awoke and found it but a dream. There had never been an absence of power or apprehension in her mind, but both had been ill-used. Matilda was too judicious to force the seed; she led her by a gentle influence:

"Cast after cast, by force or guile,
All waters must be tried."

"By blameless guile, or gentle force,
As when He deign'd to teach
(The lode-star of our Christian course)
Upon this sacred beach."

Nor did she trust in her own strength. She knew that she was but a humble instrument in God's hands, and as such she "asked, and it was given; knocked, and it was opened." She thanked her heavenly Father for having, even by this thorny path, touched her sister's heart. His dispensations are mysterious. "It is the goodness of God that turns our poisons into cordials. God's vine bears the better for bleeding[1]." "We see" (says the heavenly-minded Leighton) "in a Jew-man's shop that, as there are jewels and diamonds, and other precious stones, so there are fyles, cutting instruments, and many sharp tools for their polishing; and while they are in the workshop, they are continual neighbours to them, and often come under them. The Church is God's jewellery, His workshop, where His jewels are polishing for His palace and house; and those which He especially esteems, and means to make most resplendent, He has oftenest under His tools." Thus it is that our prayers

[1] Bishop Hall's Contemplations.

are not always answered according to our desires, but according to that which God sees most likely to conduce to our spiritual welfare. "As a little child, which goes into the garden to gather a sweet posy for his father, gathers some flowers and some weeds, and then carries it first to its mother, that she may separate weeds from the flowers; even so it is with Christ and our prayers: He takes out the weeds, the sins of our prayers, and then presents our petitions to His Father as a sweet-smelling savour."

As soon as Lady Davenport could be moved, Matilda took her to Ormanton. Lord Davenport had sunk into complete imbecility, and was little affected either by the death of his son or his wife's illness. As long as he could enjoy the pleasures of the table, and could feel warm and comfortable, all passing events were indifferent to him. Separated as he now was from the consequence which he had given by his name and fortune, he appeared in his true light, and to Lady Davenport he had become a loathsome object. By imperceptible degrees the spark of understanding which had scarcely glimmered through the mist that enveloped it gradually died away, and he became a confirmed idiot. All that he now required was a kind superintendence: this the Duke of Ormanton took the greatest care to secure him,

and visited him constantly so as to prevent neglect or ill-treatment, or to watch any signs of returning reason. The improvement in Catherine's character was progressive: it was a joyful change for herself and her daughter, who in the pale cheek and chastened and humble expression of her countenance, could scarcely recognise the rouged haughty and hard-featured woman, whom she had hitherto called mother. As soon as her health was restored she returned to Davenport, which had now become Lady Mary's. The iron rule of former days was exchanged for a milder sway. Self-respect supplanted pride. A proper regard to expenditure took the place of extravagance. A kindly feeling for others regulated her manners. None who now came to Davenport left it either indignant or humiliated. Friendship had succeeded to flattery. Friends surrounded her instead of pleasure-seekers. The tenantry, no longer regarded as so many producers of gold for the self-indulgence of the landlord, were considered as a precious deposit committed to her care, to be returned with interest. To her mother she was patient, gentle, and forbearing. She willingly shared with Miss Norton, whom she treated with respect and consideration, in the wearisome charge she had undertaken. Lady Rockingham's mind was too enfeebled to receive much light, but her darkness

was made less deep, and in her now gentle Catherine she could feel that she had a daughter. A few years more and she had ceased to occupy her accustomed place in the drawing-room. She had been left for a few minutes alone at her own desire, and when Miss Norton, surprised at not hearing the sound of her silver hand-bell, cautiously approached her apparently sleeping form, she found that life had passed away, and Lady Rockingham's race run. It could only be regarded as a happy release. She had lived to herself and for herself, had done no good and much harm, in the fearful omission of her duties. Great indeed will be the account for sins of *omission*, the fatal effects of which are often quite as great as those of commission ; and perhaps more dangerous, inasmuch as they are more insidious. "It is mostly by little steps that people go out of the way. Even great falls are prepared by little ones." "The ways of life and death part most often at what seems at first something very slight. They will seem to go on a long time side by side ; and even to the last they who think not on their ways, will not see that they have parted, because to them, not observing whither they were going, the ways have widened slowly. Yet in the end they are as wide apart as that wherein they end ; Heaven or hell."

Excepting as a care, Lady Rockingham had

long ceased to be known at the Abbey; and now that her arm-chair was vacant, it only served to remind that she had once been. Her talent had been small, her advantages in early life none, and habits once formed are very difficult to eradicate. She had lived unloving and unloved, and died unregretted. Miss Norton, who had for many years conscientiously and affectionately performed the part of companion and friend was not forgotten; a comfortable maintenance was secured to her, and she was always received as a welcome visitor at the Abbey, where it was not the custom to forget well-performed services when no longer called for.

Lord Rockingham lived to a good old age, happy in the enjoyment of his children's society. His grandchildren were a delight to him; and in due course of time, surrounded, like the patriarchs of old, by affectionate and mourning children, he closed his eyes in peace, and in the faith which had been his sheet-anchor.

Hitherto we have known Matilda only in prosperity; but the scene was about to change, and the trial of her faith was at hand. She had still three precious darlings in her nursery; and while the elder children were carefully watched over in the school-room, she found constant delight and interest in her little ones, who were as yet too young to need instruction. It was after an evening's stroll, in which the

happiness of a walk with mamma had greatly added to the children's spirits, that the little Henry complained of being very unwell; and Matilda sat up with him all night in the vain hope that the remedies used would produce sleep, and prove that it was only fatigue from the unusual length of his walk. She was composed and judicious in all her arrangements, and although her heart beat with unusual quickness, she was able to give every necessary order. Towards morning the child's restlessness increased, and on the arrival of the medical man, he pronounced the symptoms similar to those of several cases which he had during the last two days been called upon to attend, and that it was decidedly of an infectious nature. He attributed it to the emptying a large pond in which mud had been accumulating for years. As the village in which the fever had appeared was at a considerable distance, he was at a loss to understand how the child could have been exposed to it. Matilda was greatly shocked and alarmed, as the children had all been together, and the house was full of guests. She threw herself upon her knees in her own quiet chamber; and, silently imploring God's blessing upon the means used for her beloved boy's recovery, prepared herself for action. Her first step was to send for her husband, and to request him to dismiss her guests, without giving

any needless cause of alarm. The apartments allotted to her own family were distant from the rooms devoted to visitors, so that there was little risk of the infection having already spread. Matilda, dismissing all unnecessary attendance, and dressing herself in materials that could not convey the fever, determined, after separating the other children, to nurse the little sufferer herself. For many days she watched the struggle between life and death, but it was not God's will that her prayers should be answered as she expected; and scarcely had the tender life passed away, when the others sickened, and in a little more than a week the grave had closed over her treasures. The hitherto joyful nurseries were silent, and the mother was bereaved indeed. She wept, but they were "not the tear-drops of woe." Her's was a godly sorrow; she bowed her head, and, like Elijah in the whirlwind, wrapped her mantle of prayer and faith around her, and waited for the "still small voice." She did not wait in vain, for though her heart was sorely wounded, though her spirits sank, she could yet say, "Thy will be done." It was long before she regained entire composure, and she remembered the wise man's saying, "In time of trouble make not haste," and allowed her mind time to rally before she exposed her-

self to rude contact with the world. It would be well if this excellent advice were oftener followed. The shock to the nerves from a severe affliction is overwhelming. In the first moments of sorrow, friends and relatives crowd around us, and there is an unnatural excitement in the sufferer. Every body understands the feelings, and a season of separation is allowed. If these feelings are forced, the reaction, when all has returned to the usual routine except the one spring of our former happiness, is dreadful; and thus, when others have forgotten, the time of sympathy has unconsciously passed, and the mourner is expected to take part as before, the outward garb of woe being all the tolerated sign of grief. Matilda, while she quietly performed her round of duties, and remembered the many blessings which still surrounded her, lived with the duke in retirement for many weeks. Then she appeared among her friends with a calm and chastened grief; and though the dear ones she had lost still lived in her heart; though she still felt the little warm hand clasped in hers; though the shrill voice of childhood still sounded in her ears; though she could almost fancy that the little pattering feet were still at her side; though, when she returned to her solitary chamber, her very inmost soul was pierced

with sorrow, and she could have shed tears of blood — she kept the remembrance as a sacred deposit, and as a constant subject of silent meditation and prayer. It had been discovered that the nursery-maid had received a large packet of woollen articles from one of the infected houses, and, unconscious of the poison they conveyed, had allowed the little Henry to stand by her while she opened it, and thus the infection had spread: she herself fell a victim to the disorder, and it was long before its fatal effects ceased. Matilda had thus restored the "lent jewels" to God, who had allowed her to enjoy them for a few short years. He had now "resumed them again,"

> "And the mother gave in tears and pain
> The flowers she most did love;
> She knew she should find them all again
> In the fields of light above.
>
> "O, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
> The Reaper came that day;
> 'Twas an angel visited the green earth,
> And took the flowers away[1]."

All remained quiet and peaceful at Staunton. Mr. and Mrs. Delville enjoyed the blessing and happiness of seeing their children witness to their judicious training, and might repose after their labours in peace. Mr. Delville, with Mrs. Somerset's consent, resigned the living to his son: and as Algernon had succeeded to his

[1] Longfellow.

uncle's property, he had retired with his younger children to Heath Farm, still ever ready to take an active part in the duties of the parish over which he had so long presided.

Colonel and Lady Sophia Cumberland returned to Devonshire, accompanied by their son Edward, who continued a useless member of society. It was reported that Mr. and Mrs. Watson were very happy at Liverpool, where he had become a popular preacher, and was adored by the ladies as a "sweet man;" and Mrs. Watson presided over committees where there was much talking and little doing, and gave constant tea-parties, where she entertained her guests with all the sayings and doings of her charming friend, the Duchess of Ormanton, and sweet Lady Cornbury, and dear Lady Sophia, who was like a sister to her. It might perhaps excite a little surprise that these much prized friends never appeared to remember the beloved Mrs. Watson, but this was only a malicious whisper. She had frequent working parties, where all who were absent became objects of animadversion. No character was safe, and the only difference between these meetings and assemblies, was that they were advertised under false colours.

Susan had not been forgiven, and had led a miserable life with a vulgar and illiterate man who treated her very ill. He had married her

under the idea that she was her aunt's heiress, of whose means he had formed a mistaken estimate, and on finding out his error had deserted her. It was by accident that Mrs. Somerset, whose secret charities in London were almost as numerous as her acts of kindness at Staunton, had discovered her in a state of the greatest penury in a miserable garret, in a dirty alley in one of the most obscure parts of the town. The housekeeper had been sent to redeem some articles out of pawn at one of those wretched receptacles of distress, and saw a poor sick-looking woman, with an infant in her arms which she seemed scarcely able to carry. She heard her in a weak and faint voice offer two or three poor-looking garments to the sharp eyes of one of the shopmen, who spoke roughly to her, and refused to give her more than half-a-crown. The poor creature looked much disappointed, and weeping bitterly declared that she must have six shillings before the morning, or that she and her children should be turned into the street. The man answered that it was no concern of his, that the clothes were mere rags, and that he had offered more than they were worth; and, growing angry at her continued entreaties, told her to troop off, for that he had no time to waste on such idle baggages. Mrs. Stilton, the Staunton housekeeper, thought she recognised the voice, though in the pale and

attenuated object before her she could scarcely recognise the once robust and ruddy Susan. On her leaving the shop she followed her, and traced her to her miserable refuge.

On her return Mrs. Stilton communicated what she had seen to Mrs. Somerset; who, fearful of the consequences of allowing the morning to dawn, or rather to attempt to pierce the dense atmosphere of the miserable hole in which her lodging was, before the rent was paid, sent her servant in a cab to see the landlord, desiring her to tell him that she would be answerable for the demand. Unwilling to intrude at so late an hour, she left Susan undisturbed that night; but on the following morning sent her, through one of the visitors who ventured into the den of thieves and vagabonds, a variety of necessary articles. She made many inquiries, and finding that Susan had always conducted herself with propriety, she determined to do something for her. She first wrote to Mrs. Watson, who refused ever to see her again, adding that it would be a disgrace to her sisters and an injury to her husband. Thus they turned their backs upon a repentant wanderer; for Susan, who was by no means a bad-hearted or ill-disposed girl, had been led away by vanity acting upon her total want of education, and the absence of all guidance and direction. Mrs. Somerset, ever ready to forgive and to

forget, after visiting her and finding her completely humbled, and deeply impressed with the folly and weakness of her conduct and its want of delicacy, removed her into decent lodgings with her two children, and gave them respectable clothing. To restore Susan to her former position she regarded as improper, and it was difficult to know what to do with her. She seemed unwilling to part with her children, but professed herself able and ready to work for them. She was not fit to keep a school, as she had neither instruction or understanding for such an undertaking, and Mrs. Somerset in all her actions considered justice. She would have regarded it as an act of dishonesty to recommend one to the detriment of another; more especially as she felt that many looked up to her, and would have considered her sanction a guarantee for the character of the person she recommended. She was just, as well as generous, and no prejudices ever influenced her judgment; equally attentive to the interests of all. Mrs. Stilton came to her assistance, for the difficulty in the present case was great. She had ascertained that Susan had a natural talent for millinery, and that during the years in which she had followed her husband with the actors, she had been constantly employed to work for the company. She therefore pro-

posed to her cousin to receive her as a partner; Susan, too happy to have so comfortable a prospect, and unwilling to be seen where she had been known before, gladly accepted the offer, and, through Mrs. Somerset's assistance, was respectably established with Mrs. Lincoln. Her husband died soon after, and she continued to conduct herself with propriety. Mrs. Somerset never lost sight of her, and secured her by her recommendations a considerable business to the shop, enabling her to provide respectably for her children; while Mrs. Lincoln supported her sister's family, who from untoward circumstances were in great distress; thus doing much more good than if she had supported them in dependence and idleness. Susan, constantly remembering her own misconduct, watched carefully over the morals of the young women committed to her care, and the influence of her patroness was visible throughout the whole of her arrangements.

We must now take leave of the friends with whom, I hope, we have passed a short but pleasant time. If one heart has been led to the love of that which is good, every wish of the author will be gratified. In the truth and consistency of Mrs. Somerset we recognise the loveliness of true religion; in Lady Davenport, the vanity of earthly things

when abused instead of being used ; and in Mrs. Watson, a profession of the head where the heart is untouched. "Some people carry their hearts in their heads. Very many carry their heads in their hearts. The difficulty is to keep them apart, and yet both actively working together;" a difficulty Mrs. Watson never could surmount. She made religion a cloak for maliciousness. Lady Melcombe and Mrs. Armstrong are every-day characters. From them we may learn that the mere pride of riches will not satisfy, and that "a good name is more to be desired than great riches;" for, as the wise Solomon says, "What hath pride profited us? or What good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by. But the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High. Therefore they shall receive a glorious kingdom and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand." Of the Staunton party it may be said,

"That they had souls that seem to dwell
Above this earth—so rich a spell
Floats round their steps where'er they move,
From hopes fulfill'd and mutual love.
Such if on high their hearts are set
Nor in the stream the source forget,

If prompt to leave the bliss they know,
Following the Lamb where'er they go
By purest pleasures unbeguiled
To idolize or wife or child:
Such wedded souls our God shall own,
For faultless virgins round his throne."

THE END.

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